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FRESH POLITICS: COMEDY, CELEBRITY, AND THE PROMISE OF NEW POLITICAL OUTLOOKS

by

Amy B. Becker

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

FRESH POLITICS: COMEDY, CELEBRITY, AND THE PROMISE OF NEW

POLITICAL OUTLOOKS

Amy B. Becker

Under the supervision of Professor Dietram A. Scheufele

at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

The mass media environment has changed significantly over the course of the past decade. Individuals are no longer watching the same news and entertainment programs as their peers. Today, the post-broadcast media environment offers increasing media choice, new formats for content delivery, and the ability to craft a media diet that strikes the right balance between news, sports, entertainment, and reality television. In part as a response to these changes, communications researchers have focused on understanding how the proliferation of soft news programs, particularly late night political comedy, influences political life. At the same time, communication research has taken note of the blurring lines between celebrity and politician and has started to consider the net impact of celebrity involvement in politics on civic life. All told, there is great interest in understanding how various forms of political entertainment are reshaping our shared mass media and political experience.

Relying on data from two experimental studies, this dissertation extends current research on the influence of political entertainment on political life. Study 1 focuses on political comedy programming by first considering whether diverse forms of political humor differentially impact political attitudes. The results suggest that viewing self-directed humor can have a positive effect on political attitudes while viewing hostile humor can have a cooling effect on political attitudes. As a second point of inquiry, Study 1 considers the impact of exposure to diverse forms of political comedy on political trust and internal political efficacy.

Study 2 extends the boundaries of political entertainment research to focus on the impact of celebrity involvement in political life. Study 2 begins by assessing the current state of celebrity politics in the post-2008 election environment, focusing on receptivity toward celebrity political involvement, the appropriateness of involvement in key issue debates, and internal political efficacy. Next, Study 2 considers the impact of exposure to celebrity and expert issue appeals on situational involvement, complacency, and issue apathy. The results suggest that celebrity political involvement can positively impact public opinion and political engagement at the issue level. The project concludes by discussing the implications for political campaigns and civic engagement.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Political Entertainment

Almost ten years ago, in a volume on the new mediated political experience, Delli

Carpini and Williams (2001) argued:

> Individuals are simultaneously citizens, consumers, audiences, family members,
>
> workers and so forth. Politics is built on deep-seated cultural values and beliefs
>
> that are imbedded in the seemingly nonpolitical aspects of public and private life.
>
> Entertainment media often provide factual information, stimulate social and
>
> political debate, and critique government, while public affairs media are all too
>
> often diversionary, contextless, and politically irrelevant … politics is largely a
>
> mediated experience; that political attitudes and actions result from the
>
> interpretation of new information through the lenses of previously held
>
> assumptions and beliefs; and that these lenses are socially constructed from a
>
> range of shared cultural sources … to the extent that researchers have ignored or
>
> downplayed entertainment media, popular culture, art, and so forth, in the
>
> construction of both news and public opinion, we have missed a critical
>
> component of this process" (p. 161).

In fact, over the course of the past decade, political communication researchers

have spent considerable time exploring the connections between entertainment media,

popular culture, traditional media, public opinion, and political engagement. Current

work recognizes that contemporary political life is indeed defined by a mediated

experience that is situated within a diverse post-broadcast media environment (Prior, 2007). More than ever before, citizens are able to exercise almost complete control over their media environment, consciously choosing between political, entertainment, reality, and sports programming across a variety of media platforms – from television to print to radio to online. In effect, the post-broadcast media environment allows political junkies to "overdose" and tune into political news programming almost exclusively while also allowing the vast majority of Americans, members of what we have come to define as "the inattentive public," to rely almost entirely on entertainment programming (Cao, 2010).

In reality, however, patterns of media consumption reflect a mixed rather than all entertainment or news diet, dictated in part by the balance between an individual's relative entertainment preference (REP) and their relative news preference (RNP) (Baum, 2003b; Prior, 2005, 2007). Making the picture a bit more complicated is the increasing prevalence of what has come to be defined as "soft news" or "infotainment programming," essentially programs that are entertainment first and foremost but that also address topical or newsworthy concerns (Baum, 2003a; Baum & Jamison, 2006; Prior, 2003; Zaller, 2003). Soft news or infotainment programs run the gamut -- from entertainment talk shows like *Oprah* or *The View*, to entertainment news programs like *Entertainment Tonight* or *Access Hollywood*, to news magazine programs like *20/20* or *Dateline NBC*, to network late night comedy programs like *The Late Show with David Letterman* or *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, and finally to cable late night comedy programs like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report*. These soft news

programs have become an important pit-stop for political candidates campaigning for

higher office, for celebrity politicos championing a pet cause, for best-selling authors

promoting their new novel or non-fiction piece, and for average Americans looking to

share their human stories (Baum, 2005; Morris, 2009; Young, 2004, 2006).

To date, considerable work has focused on assessing the political effects that

result from exposure to soft news and infotainment programming, paying particular

attention to programs like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. With approximately

20% of the general public indicating that they regularly watch programs like *The Daily

Show* and *The Colbert Report,* and with almost half of Colbert and Stewart's regular

viewers under the age of 30 (43% for Colbert, 42% for Stewart according to the 2008

Pew Biennial News Consumption Survey), there is good reason to separate out late night

cable political satire programs from the larger soft news programming category (Pew,

2008a). Moreover, the results of a recent, albeit unscientific *Time Magazine* online poll of

over 9,000 individuals shows that Jon Stewart is seen as America's most trusted

newscaster with 44% of the vote, followed by 29% for Brian Williams, 19% for Charlie

Gibson, and 7% for Katie Couric (Linkins, 2009).The results are sorted by state and

based on the response to the question, "Now that Walter Cronkite has passed on, who is

America's most trusted newscaster?" ("Time poll results," 2009). It is important to point

out that while Jon Stewart has the lead in over half of the fifty United States, he is not an

American newscaster, but rather the self-described host of a fake news program.

Nevertheless, Stewart's popularity and influence continues to grow, as does Stephen

Colbert's.

Recent work on the impact of political comedy programming has focused on connecting exposure to cable (and before that network late night comedy) with relevant political dependent variables like knowledge, participation, and cynicism. At the same time, researchers are also looking at how exposure to comedy primes evaluations of politicians and political institutions and influences political opinions and attitudes. Results from recent studies suggest that exposure to political comedy can increase levels of factual political knowledge, encourage certain forms of political engagement, differentially influence measures of external and internal efficacy, encourage normally inattentive individuals to pay attention to related news content presented in more traditional formats, and influence evaluations of political actors and media outlets (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Cao, 2008; Cao & Brewer, 2008; Feldman & Young, 2008; Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Hollander, 2005; Kim & Vishak, 2008; Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005; Xenos & Becker, 2009; Young, 2006). All told, this body of research still presents a mixed picture of the political effects that result from exposure to political comedy and soft news. Moreover, recent efforts have often been criticized for lacking a real theoretical framework or systematic approach to measuring the range of effects connected with exposure to political comedy and soft news programming. In fact, only a handful of efforts to date have examined the psychological mechanisms underlying the processing of this type of programmatic content (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008b; Nabi, Moyer-Guse, & Byrne, 2007; Polk, Young, & Holbert, 2009; Young, 2008).

Moreover, current research tends to treat political comedy as one monolithic form even though recent work has pointed toward a rich, diverse, and varied body of political

comedy content (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008b; LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009; Young & Tisinger, 2006). Recognizing the limitations of current research approaches, this dissertation project seeks to extend work on the political effects of exposure to political comedy by first situating various forms of political humor in context. Rather than treat political comedy as one massive and singular form, the current project separates out the unique properties of two types of humor: (1) other-directed humor, or traditional hostile political satire, and (2) self-directed or self-deprecating humor. In evaluating the differential impact of diverse forms of humor on political attitudes, the first part of the project augments existing work on audience evaluations of political comedy and answers the call by Holbert (2005) to focus on the unique properties of particular comedy types. In addition, this first piece of the project juxtaposes exposure to political comedy programming against exposure to traditional hard news content and political attack advertisements in an attempt to better approximate the campaign media environment.

Another relevant criticism of current research on the impacts of political comedy programming is that analyses of effects tend to focus on measuring one key political variable of interest (*e.g.*, knowledge, cynicism, engagement) in isolation. Moreover, current work on the political effects of exposure to comedy fails to account for the full range of available comedy content. In today's diverse media environment, consumers can read the print pages of *The Onion* or view similar content presented online in video format by *The Onion News Network* or even listen to recorded content presented by *The Onion Radio News*. Television viewers can tune into *The Daily Show, The Colbert*

Report, network late night comedy programs presented by hosts like David Letterman, Jay Leno, Jimmy Kimmel, and Jimmy Fallon, or parody programs like *Saturday Night Live*. Political comedy content is also available online in viral form either on *YouTube* or targeted sites like *Funny or Die* or *JibJab*. Lastly, current work disappoints by not fully situating comedy viewing alongside patterns of more traditional news viewing. Recent studies (Feldman & Young, 2008; Young & Tisinger, 2006) have shown that young comedy viewers are also paying attention to more traditional news content, yet current research fails to fully capture this duality of experience.

As a response, the second piece of the dissertation project studies the effect of exposure to political comedy programming on two related political variables of interest – political trust and internal political efficacy. In addition, the analyses consider the effects of exposure to a diverse selection of comedy content including network comedy, cable comedy, political humor web sites (*The Onion, Funny or Die*, and *Jib-Jab*), and political parody programs like *Saturday Night Live*. Finally, the effects of exposure to political comedy are considered alongside exposure to more traditional network and cable news programming, thus situating the research within the larger post-broadcast media environment and recognizing that young comedy viewers are also watching the news.

Celebrity Politics

Over the course of the past decade and even before, our political culture has seen the lines separating politician and celebrity blur and the connections between the worlds of Hollywood and Washington DC grow stronger. Writing in 2003, West and Orman noted:

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the signs have been clear that the

American political system has changed into a celebrity regime where politicians

are subjected to Hollywood-style tabloid coverage and celebrities are treated as

political actors. It is all part of the entertaining of America. No longer does the

argument of whether pop culture influences political change or vice versa matter.

Politics is pop culture (p. x).

While researchers continue to debate the merits of celebrity involvement in politics with

some pointing toward positive gains in youth civic and political engagement and others

mourning the destruction of our political and civil society, it has become obvious that

celebrity involvement in national and international political life is just part and parcel of

our political culture (Austin, Van de Vord, Pinkleton, & Epstein, 2008; Gitlin, 2003;

Payne, Hanlon, & Twomey, 2007; Postman, 2006; Weiskel, 2005). Celebrities run for

and hold elective office, act as issue advocates, endorse candidates, and perpetuate

political dynasties.

Recent work on the influence of celebrity involvement in politics has focused on

studying the impacts of get-out-the-vote (GOTV) appeals, celebrity endorsements of

political candidates, and celebrity statements on controversial issues. On the whole,

recent research suggests that celebrity GOTV appeals can positively impact youth civic

and political engagement, that celebrity candidate endorsements can positively impact

perceptions of a candidate's electability and voting likelihood, and that celebrity

statements on the issues can reinforce agreement with accepted political arguments and

also make unpopular political statements more tolerable (Austin, et al., 2008; Jackson,

2007; Jackson & Darrow, 2005; Pease & Brewer, 2008; Wood & Herbst, 2007). The volume of empirical work on the influence of celebrity involvement in politics is growing, adding depth and substance to a timely yet fragmented research trajectory.

The second half of the dissertation project seeks to add to the current body of work on celebrity politics by considering how celebrity issue advocacy efforts influence public opinion and political engagement at the issue level. As a first step, the third major piece of the project works to understand the scope of celebrity politics in the post-2008 election environment. Focusing first on the contrast between perceived issue importance and appropriateness of celebrity involvement on key political issues, the findings suggest that the more important the political issue, the less acceptable it is for celebrities to get involved to champion their own viewpoint. Conversely, the less important the political issue, the more appropriate it is for celebrities to be actively involved. Next, the study considers what factors influence receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics and whether exposure to celebrity issue appeals has an effect on internal political efficacy. Essentially, this first piece on celebrity politics suggests that exposure to celebrity issue appeals, whether in video or text format, positively influences receptivity toward celebrity political involvement at the issue level and that lay issue advocates and social movement groups may benefit from further cultivating relationships with key celebrity advocates. While the results failed to show a connection between exposure to celebrity issue appeals and evaluations of internal political efficacy, this third major piece of the dissertation project stresses the need for future research to consider the net impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics.

The fourth major piece of the project extends work on celebrity politics by looking at whether receptivity toward celebrity political involvement and exposure to celebrity issue appeals impacts situational involvement, complacency, and apathy at the issue level. Contrasting Angelina Jolie's testimony on the global refugee crisis with that of an issue expert, Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and Former Prime Minister of Portugal, this last piece shows (as expected) that receptivity toward celebrity involvement in politics has a negative impact on complacency but no effect on issue apathy. The results also suggest that situational involvement with the global refugee crisis issue debate is negatively related to both issue apathy and complacency. Overall, the results suggest that exposure to celebrity issue advocacy messages can positively impact issue engagement, but that this impact often depends upon the prior perceived importance of the issue and the perceived credibility, favorability, and/or attractiveness of the celebrity advocate.

There are a few key reasons why this study of the influence of celebrity politics focuses on understanding impacts at the issue level. First, most of the work on celebrity politics looks at political engagement and public opinion at a more general level and is only concerned with celebrity endorsements and involvement in national high-profile elections. Focusing on politics at the issue level seems like a natural extension of the scope of current work. In fact, the fourth major piece of the dissertation applies some of the key variables explicated in recent work by Austin et al., (2008) to the discussion of issue politics. Second, the sheer number of celebrities involved in high profile issue advocacy efforts makes an issue level investigation a worthy endeavor. Organizations

like the Entertainment Industry Foundation and others help facilitate celebrity activity on key political issues and numerous celebrities (Matt Damon, Bono, George Clooney, Don Cheadle, etc.) spearhead their own issue advocacy organizations. Third, there are more ways than ever for young people to learn about and participate on the issues—whether on Facebook, through campus groups, or stand-alone Internet sites, the potential possibilities are really quite varied, posing interesting normative questions about the quality of related political engagement and information seeking behavior. Finally, a focus on public opinion and political engagement at the issue level allows me to connect my work on public opinion and issue politics (A. B. Becker, Dalrymple, Brossard, Scheufele, & Gunther, 2010; A. B. Becker & Scheufele, 2009) with my interest in and research on political entertainment (A. B. Becker, Xenos, & Waisanen, in press; Xenos & Becker, 2009).

Theory, Design, and Data

The dissertation project is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing upon prior theoretical contributions made in the fields of communication, political science, public opinion, social psychology, advertising research, humor studies, and cultural/critical studies. The first major piece considers prior work on political entertainment, humor, social psychology, and recent publications in the cultural/critical studies field addressing humor and satire. The second major piece again builds from prior work on political entertainment while also discussing key contributions from political science, focusing on concepts like political trust and internal political efficacy. The third major piece brings together current work in communication, public opinion, and political science as does the

fourth piece which also ads key contributions from the field of advertising research (*i.e.,* celebrity endorsements and advertising, source credibility, attractiveness, and celebrity vs. expert endorsements). While the dissertation draws on a rich academic tradition, it is also intended to be relevant, timely, and accessible – a clear snapshot of our contemporary media and political landscape.

Taken together, the project seeks to understand how political entertainment is redefining the shared mass media and political experience by looking at how exposure to political entertainment --- whether in the form of political comedy or celebrity advocacy --- influences related political attitudes and behaviors. More specifically, the first piece in each major part of the project considers how exposure to both political entertainment content and more traditional forms of news media influences political opinions, either with respect toward particular candidates (*i.e.,* John McCain) or toward certain political issues (*i.e.,* the political importance of issues like the economy, gay marriage, the environment, or the global refugee crisis). The second piece in each major part of the project looks at the influence of exposure to political entertainment on behavioral outcomes like trust, internal political efficacy, and issue engagement (*i.e.,* situational involvement, complacency, and apathy), in an attempt to understand both the more macro and more micro-level behavioral effects that result from exposure to political entertainment.

While comedy and celebrity might seem like two related albeit ultimately dissimilar concepts, the two research areas actually fit together quite nicely and speak to the evolving and dynamic nature of our contemporary political culture. In the present

media environment, cable and network late night comedians are political entertainers and some of the most visible celebrity figures. Celebrities are increasingly branching out beyond traditional entertainment media opportunities, lending their voices and offering their support as advocates for a whole range of political issues and engaging in the timely, calculated practice of endorsing candidates in competitive, high-profile election campaigns. Moreover, politicians are increasingly packaged and handled like celebrity icons, as the emphasis shifts from communicating the political to calibrating the discussion of all things personal. If politics is indeed the equivalent of pop culture as West and Orman (2003) suggest, then examining the impact of both political comedy and celebrity advocacy should bring us closer toward a more rich, detailed, and thorough understanding of the ways in which political entertainment is redefining the shared mass media and political experience. Focusing on both political comedy and celebrity allows for a more robust and comprehensive study of the mediated political experience.

A particular emphasis on key dependent variables like internal political efficacy, for example, runs throughout the discussion, reinforcing the focus on behavior and engagement at the individual level. On the whole, the project explicates both the positive contributions and the negative implications of exposure and attention to politically entertaining content, with an emphasis toward understanding the net effects of exposure on public opinion and political engagement. In the end, the project raises interesting normative questions and concerns about the future of youth civic and political engagement.

As first proposed, the dissertation project was designed to bring together four thematically related journal-ready articles. The idea is that each piece can eventually stand-alone as either a peer-reviewed journal piece, a chapter in an edited volume, and/or a conference publication. In fact, an earlier version of the first article was presented at the 2009 MAPOR conference and will be the first piece submitted to a journal for review. While this four-article style is a bit non-traditional, it is in line with the current publishing norms and expectations for scholars in the field.

The dissertation relies almost exclusively on experimental data collected in the spring and fall of 2009, although secondary survey statistics from the Pew Research Center and other organizations are presented throughout. The first data set is from a Media Lab experiment conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) and Louisiana State University (LSU) during April and May of 2009. The six-condition study had an overall $N = 499$ with 313 students participating across six conditions at UW-Madison in April of 2009 and 186 students participating across four conditions at LSU in April and May of 2009. Subjects from UW-Madison were enrolled in communications, political science, or marketing courses, while students at LSU were enrolled in communications courses. All subjects received extra course credit in exchange for their participation. Each condition featured a different video stimuli clip, a distractor video/task, and the same pre and post-test questionnaires. This first dataset serves as the focus of the first and second pieces of the dissertation project and is discussed at great length in subsequent chapters and in the concluding section of the manuscript.

The second data set is from an online experiment conducted among undergraduates (N = 483) at UW-Madison between October 4 – 16, 2009. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four experimental treatment conditions (celebrity video, expert video, celebrity text, expert text) or a control group. Subjects received extra credit in exchange for their participation and were recruited from courses in the Departments of Life Sciences Communication, Communication Arts, and the School of Journalism & Mass Communication. Each condition received the same basic pre and post-test questionnaire and some additional questions particular to each experimental condition. This second dataset serves as the focus of the third and fourth pieces of the dissertation project and is discussed at great length in subsequent chapters and in the concluding section of the manuscript.

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation consists of six separate chapters. After this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents the first article-length piece focusing on the differential impact of diverse comedy forms on political attitudes. Analyzing data from the first experiment, this second chapter partitions political comedy into two corresponding camps: (1) other-directed humor or traditional hostile political satire, and (2) self-directed or self-deprecating humor. The results show that different comedy forms do have a differential impact on political attitudes and suggest that it is indeed important for future research to unpack political humor rather than treat comedy as one monolithic form.

Chapter 3 considers the impact of exposure to political comedy on two related political variables of interest: political trust and internal political efficacy. The analyses

consider various forms of comedy in context and situate the investigation within the larger post-broadcast media environment, recognizing that young comedy viewers are also tuning into traditional network and cable news content. Chapter 3 relies on data from the first experiment.

Chapters 4 and 5 broaden the theoretical scope of current research on political entertainment, focusing on celebrity politics in an effort to understand the net impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics on public opinion and political engagement. Chapter 4 assesses the current state of celebrity politics in the post-2008 election environment, focusing on perceived issue importance and the appropriateness of celebrity involvement on key issues, the impact of exposure to video and text celebrity issue appeals on receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics, and the connections between celebrity issue politics and evaluations of internal political efficacy. Chapter 4 presents results from a series of analyses that use data from the second experiment and also draws upon public opinion data accessed through the Roper iPoll database.

Extending research on celebrity politics toward a more formal study of the effects of exposure to celebrity involvement in issue politics, Chapter 5 considers the impact of exposure to celebrity issue advocacy appeals on public opinion and political engagement at the issue level using Angelina Jolie's involvement with the global refugee crisis as a case study. Extending prior work by Austin et al., (2008), the analyses presented in Chapter 5 measure the impact of receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics on situational involvement, complacency, and issue apathy. Analyzing data from

the second experiment, Chapter 5 concludes by discussing the potential positive benefits that stem from celebrity involvement in issue politics.

Chapter 6 acts as a concluding piece, bringing the results from the four previous chapters together to talk about contributions to the field of communication research, implications, and questions for future research. An in-depth discussion of each data set is included, highlighting advantages, disadvantages, and the relevant limitations of each experimental design. In addition, a larger piece addressing potential validity concerns that often arise when relying on experimental data is included.

CHAPTER 2: COMEDY FORMS AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES: THE
DIFFERENTIAL INFLUENCE OF SATIRE AND SELF-RIDICULE ON CANDIDATE
EVALUATIONS

Introduction

Over the course of the past decade, political communications research has focused

on examining the relationship between exposure to late-night comedy and political

efficacy, political participation and engagement, and political knowledge and learning

(Baum, 2003a; Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Cao, 2008; Cao & Brewer, 2008;

Hollander, 2005; Kim & Vishak, 2008; Moy, Xenos, et al., 2005; Xenos & Becker,

2009). A related strain of research has considered how exposure to late-night comedy

primes evaluations of political candidates and influences political attitudes (Morris, 2009;

Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2006; Young, 2004, 2006). On the whole, recent studies suggest

that exposure to late-night comedy can have a positive impact on political knowledge and

learning, encourage particular forms of political engagement and involvement,

differentially influence measures of external and internal efficacy, and act as a gateway,

encouraging normally inattentive individuals to pay attention to related content presented

by more traditional news sources (Baum, 2003a; Brewer & Cao, 2006; Feldman &

Young, 2008; Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton, 2007). As

the dividing line between what is considered traditional hard news vs. soft news

continues to blur, scholars have stressed the need for a more theoretical, systematic, and

coherent approach to the study of late-night comedy and infotainment programming

(Young, 2008). As a result, recent work has in part shifted to focus on understanding the

psychological mechanisms that underlie the processing of politically entertaining content (Nabi, et al., 2007; Polk, et al., 2009; Young, 2008).

Historically, research on late-night comedy has tended to focus on a subsample of relevant programming – primarily connecting an investigation of the behavioral effects of exposure to late-night comedy with monologues and interviews on programs like *Late Night with David Letterman* and *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, and satirical news segments from Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*. It is only recently that research efforts have begun to focus on other forms of political comedy, analyzing reactions to online content from video web sites like *JibJab* (Baumgartner, 2007) or the more character-driven deadpan satire of Stephen Colbert's *The Colbert Report* (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008a, 2008b; LaMarre, et al., 2009). Moreover, little, if any research to date, has examined how exposure to parody-driven programs like *Saturday Night Live* influences political attitudes and behaviors (Jones, 2009) . Similarly, research has yet to examine the differential impacts of exposure to various types of humor (*i.e.,* satire, self-ridicule) on political attitudes and behavior, especially when juxtaposed against each other as part of a rich news and entertainment media diet.

Using data from experimental studies conducted in the spring of 2009, this research first seeks to understand how individual perceptions and processing of various types of humor differ given the fundamental distinctions that separate the forms of satire or other-directed hostile humor and self-deprecating humor, *i.e.,* the satirization, or ridicule of the self. In unpacking political humor, this article partitions comedy into two corresponding camps: 1) other-directed humor, or more conventional attempts at political

satire in which the comedian acts as the satirist, presenting a hostile critique of a politician, and 2) self-directed humor, or more atypical efforts in which the satirist is also the satirized. Put more simply, this second form of humor centers on the ability of the politician to poke fun at him or herself in a self-deprecating fashion, negotiating the balance between winning the approval and laughter of the audience vs. making too much fun of the serious matter that is politics (Kolbert, 2004). Second, this study attempts to round out some of the existing gaps in the research on the political effects of late-night comedy, by focusing on content from the 2008 election cycle that aired on programs like *Saturday Night Live* and *The Colbert Report* -- programs that have heretofore received limited scholarly attention.

Comedy Forms in Context

Assessing the impact of programs like *The Colbert Report* or *Saturday Night Live* on voter attitudes and opinions should be grounded in a study of comedy forms, separating out the unique properties of satire, parody, and self-ridicule. An investigation of this kind needs to understand variations in the cognitive complexity and levels of incongruity inherent in different types of humor presentation, rather than just treat humor as one monolithic form. Drawing in part upon previous work by Nabi et al. (2007) and Young (2008), this study briefly considers the impact of perceived source credibility, level of argument scrutiny, and the practice of message discounting on the processing of political humor. In addition, this research builds upon previous work that has examined the impact of more personal candidate interview appearances on soft news and political

comedy programs on viewer attitudes and public opinion (Baum, 2005; Moy, et al., 2006; Young, 2006). At the same time, however, this study takes a more sophisticated approach toward studying the impact of candidate appearances by considering the strategic value of both straightforward interview appearances and less conventional presentations of self-directed humor for competitive election campaigns. While previous work has suggested that these more personalized interview appearances help rather than harm the campaign efforts of candidates running for higher office, there is a definite need for a more explicit understanding of which types of more personalized media appearances are clear boons for candidates and which are potential busts. Moreover, campaigns and candidates alike need to better understand which forms of humor can boost campaign performance (and when); alternatively it is important to assess whether (and when) certain types of political humor can go too far, promoting a cynical rather than participatory politics (Shifman, Coleman, & Ward, 2007). To establish a general framework for this larger study, a first research question that considers the differential impacts of various forms of humor on political attitudes is put forth:

RQ1: To what extent does exposure to diverse forms of humor differentially influence political attitudes?

Recent work in the field of communication research applies dual-processing theories like the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) or the heuristic systematic model (HSM) toward an understanding of the processing of humorous content (Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Nabi, et al., 2007; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Polk, et al., 2009; Young, 2008) This research considers whether humorous content is processed through a central route,

thus requiring more in-depth thought and scrutiny, or through a peripheral route, with individuals relying on heuristics to process humorous content, given less ability and/or motivation for central processing tasks. Recent work by Nabi et al. (2007) and Young (2008), for example, suggests that the more sophisticated the humor, the greater likelihood that an individual will focus their cognitive effort on simply getting the joke, rather than on any attempt at argument scrutiny. In addition, if audience members like the source of the humor – either the comedian or group telling the joke – they are less likely to critically evaluate the message, choosing instead to trust and agree with the material presented by the source. Finally, if the content is seen as funny from the outset, created primarily for enjoyment and entertainment, there is greater likelihood that an individual will engage in a practice of message discounting than if presented with a content equivalent serious message.

Previous research by Robson (2000) shows how Senator Barbara Mikulski successfully used humor to deflect criticism about her single status while campaigning for re-election. In addition, related work by Baum (2005) suggests that candidate appearances on entertainment talk shows (*e.g.,* Oprah, Rosie O'Donnell, David Letterman) have a positive influence on political attitudes, with less attentive voters actually warming toward candidates they would normally oppose. In reality, appearances on entertainment talk shows like *Oprah* or even *Late Night with David Letterman* provide candidates with a real opportunity to connect with a receptive audience and allow them to talk in a more extended fashion, especially when compared to the more sound-bite driven appearances that are the standard fare of political talk shows (Moy, et al., 2006).

Candidates are able to focus on the personal, rather than on the political, and are able to use their appearances as a strategic tool, positively impacting their general "likeability" as a candidate, while also combating what critics have deemed to be their personal weaknesses (Baum, 2005; Moy, et al., 2006; Young, 2006).

Talk show appearances are particularly important for highly visible candidates who are the butt of late-night comedy jokes more often than not (Niven, Lichter, & Amundson, 2003). In addition, appearances on entertainment talk shows allow candidates to reach a viewing audience that votes, but is ultimately very different from the hard news or political talk show audience. As Baum (2005) notes, the entertainment talk show audience is younger, less educated, liberal, and more likely to be female. These inattentive viewers are less likely to hold strong partisan preferences and are more likely to rely on heuristic judgments when making political decisions (Popkin, 1994).

Recent work has also documented the political effects of exposure to candidate appearances on entertainment talk shows. For example, Brewer and Cao (2006) found that exposure to candidate appearances on late-night comedy programs actually led to an increase in viewer knowledge about the primary campaigns. Moy et al. (2006) show that exposure to late-night comedy appearances can have a priming effect on viewers who are subsequently more likely than non-viewers to base their evaluations of candidates on character traits rather than on issue content. Finally, Baum and Jamison (2006) show that exposure to candidate interviews on entertainment talk shows can lead to more consistent voting patterns among the politically inattentive.

Live from New York, it's Saturday Night ...

Since its earliest days, *Saturday Night Live* has inserted itself into the political

arena, mocking the politicians of the day – from Chevy Chase's caricatures of a clumsy

Gerald Ford, to Dan Akroyd's version of a grumpy Richard Nixon, to Dana Carvey's

parody of George Bush's "thousand points of light speech," to debate parodies during the

2000 election starring Will Ferrell as George W. Bush and Darrell Hammond as Al Gore

(Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009; Smith & Voth, 2002; Thompson, 2008). Historically,

these portrayals have focused more on *nailing the impersonation* than on offering serious

political critique (Jones, 2009). In fact, Smith and Voth (2002) cite a 2001 interview with

Lorne Michaels, *Saturday Night Live's* Executive Producer who suggests that "SNL's

spoofs tend to be more affectionate and goofy than mean" especially when compared to

the piercing monologues of late night hosts like David Letterman or Jay Leno (Holloway,

2001, p. E3 as cited in Smith and Voth, 2002).

While *Saturday Night Live* is best known for its political parodies and skillfully

crafted impersonations, the program has also provided a comic stage for politicians

themselves. As both Smith and Voth (2002) and Jones (2009) note, Al Gore and George

W. Bush benefitted from appearances on *SNL's* pre-election "Presidential Bash 2000."

By using their appearances to acknowledge their foibles, both candidates became more

human, appeared to be more in touch with the electorate, and showed that they too could

appreciate a good joke. As a contrast, former Vice President Dan Quayle, a constant

punching bag for late night comedians, never publicly acknowledged his blunders --

leaving some to argue that his failure to engage with political humor cost him any hope of

a real political future (Smith & Voth, 2002). Before *Saturday Night Live,* other variety programs like *Laugh In* provided politicians with an outlet for successful self-mockery and ridicule. In fact, some have suggested that Nixon's 1968 four second delivery of the classic "Sock it to Me?" line finally humanized the candidate, and that Democratic rival Hubert Humphrey's failure to respond might have cost him the election (Kolbert, 2004). Interestingly, once elected neither Richard Nixon nor George W. Bush felt the need to repeat any sort of comedic performance, yet Al Gore reappeared on the *SNL* stage in the years after losing the 2000 election (Kolbert, 2004).

During the 2008 election cycle, Tina Fey's parody of the Sarah Palin interview with CBS journalist Katie Couric and Amy Poehler's repeated impersonations of Hillary Clinton received considerable attention. Some have suggested that Fey's performances went beyond mere impersonation, instead they offered a critical, almost scathing perspective on Palin's candidacy (Dowd, 2009). In the last weeks of the presidential campaign, Fey made repeated appearances on *Saturday Night Live,* even appearing, however briefly, alongside Sarah Palin herself (Dowd, 2009). Interestingly, more than two-thirds of Americans who saw at least one of the Fey sketches watched the video content online or through their DVRs, skipping the live Saturday evening broadcast (Irwin, 2008). According to an October 9, 2008 Pew News Interest Index Report: "the public is just as familiar with recent political skits on Saturday Night Live portraying Palin as they are with the interviews the governor did with CBS's Katie Couric. Four-in-ten (42%) say they have heard a lot about Tina Fey's portrayal of Palin on SNL, while 41% have heard a lot about Couric's interviews with the candidate" (Pew, 2008c).

Considering the wide viral reach of the comedy sketches, and the fact that considerably more Americans viewed one or more of the *Saturday Night Live* sketches than the actual Vice Presidential debate between Sarah Palin and Joe Biden, many began to question the impact that *Saturday Night Live* would have on the election's outcome (Irwin, 2008).

In the final weekend of the campaign season, John McCain appeared as a guest on *Saturday Night Live,* making fun of his candidacy in an opening skit alongside Tina Fey (playing running mate Sarah Palin) and with a brief guest appearance on the segment *Weekend Update*. Attempting to benefit from some last-minute free exposure on national television, McCain managed to make fun of his age, his sinking campaign operation, his maverick style, and his choice of Palin as his running mate all in one short skit. Hoping to humanize his candidacy and shed his old and tired image, McCain was willing to risk any negative consequences that might result from his appearance on the show. Similarly, Palin's October 19, 2008 appearance on *Saturday Night Live* also tried to humanize her candidacy, acknowledging and embracing her political mistakes and missteps. At the time of the broadcasts, it was unclear whether McCain and Palin's performances would be well received by audiences just like the Gore and Bush appearances in November of 2000. Would voters appreciate McCain's willingness to be in on the joke, with his appearance subsequently warming voter attitudes? Would Palin's willingness to engage with political humor minimize the impact of her own gaffes and the viral success of the Fey parodies, or would she become the next Dan Quayle of the Republican Party?

Citizens of the Colbert Nation

The Colbert Report, a spin-off of *The Daily Show*, debuted on *Comedy Central* in October of 2005. Stephen Colbert, the program's host and mastermind, attempts to present his version of "truthiness," or the truth as he sees fit to the American public four times a week. Masquerading as a God-fearing Christian conservative and loyal supporter of the Republican Party, Colbert pokes fun at the liberal media and Democratic politicians (Sternbergh, 2006). Always performing in character, Colbert's deadpan satire brings a twist to the world of late-night comedy, as he both mocks and mimics programs like Bill O'Reilly's *The O'Reilly Factor*. Notably, recurring program segments like *Better Know A District* and *The Word* (modeled after Bill O'Reilly's *Talking Points*), have received considerable attention in academic and popular circles (Conway, Grabe, & Grieves, 2007; Fowler, 2008; Waisanen, 2009), while Colbert's 2007 book *I AM AMERICA (And So Can You!)* sat for weeks as the number one selection on the *New York Times Bestseller List*. Today, the "Colbert Brand," includes a Ben & Jerry's ice cream flavor, *Americone Dream*, a bridge named after Colbert in Hungary, and *Colbert Nation*, a fan web site.

In the fall of 2006, Colbert's roast of President George W. Bush at the White House Correspondents Dinner helped to further catapult the comedian toward the center of the national spotlight. According to a 2006 article in *New York Magazine*, "the speech, which was broadcast on C-span, was all over YouTube within an hour, and the clips were viewed 2.7 million times over the next two days" (Sternbergh, 2006, p. 5). In the days that followed, journalists rehashed Colbert's performance, with most applauding the

comedian for his candor. As the 2008 Presidential contest drew near, it became increasingly clear that *The Colbert Report* would be a "source to watch," providing viewers with "truthy" information on the candidates and issues.

Turning to the 2008 general election more specifically, Colbert, in remaining true to his conservative Republican persona, declared himself to be a "McCain Man" in September of 2008. Yet Colbert consistently made fun of McCain and his struggling campaign operation throughout the fall election cycle. For example, Colbert announced the Green Screen Challenge in September of 2008 (before taking a week-long break from the air after the Republican National Convention), encouraging fans to "go nuts" and manipulate online video footage from McCain's convention acceptance speech in a large-scale effort to make McCain look younger and more life-like. On October 29, 2008, with just under a week left to go in the presidential race, Colbert, still swearing allegiance to his beloved McCain, likens the candidate's campaign to a "flaming bag of dog poop dropped on America's doorstep" (Colbert, 2008, October 29). Ultimately, Colbert insists that McCain will pull the rug out from under the mainstream media, winning the election against all predicted odds. For audience members who are in on Colbert's joke, it is clear that the comedian really thinks the McCain campaign is floundering, even as his God-fearing Republican loving character paints John McCain as America's greatest hero.

Satire, Hostile Humor, and Stephen Colbert

Stephen Colbert relies on the technique of satire to get his "truthy" message across to the audience. In general, satire connects the satirist or producer of the text, in

this case Stephen Colbert, with the satiree or addressee, in this case Colbert's television and online audience, and the satirized, or the target of the attack, in this case politicians like John McCain or institutions like the mainstream media (Simpson, 2003). Satire is defined by four key elements: (1) aggression, (2) judgment, (3) play, and (4) laughter, and presents a critical perspective or take on accepted reality (Gray, et al., 2009). By capitalizing on these four features of satire, Colbert is able to point out the absurdity of the current political climate in a playful and engaging way, presenting a critique that is incongruous with more traditional perceptions of the political sphere. Of course, part of "getting" Colbert's satire means understanding the context of the situation (*i.e.,* the presidential campaign) and that Stephen Colbert is "in character" while hosting the show. Thus, processing satire, especially Colbert's heavily constructed and highly incongruous deadpan, requires effort -- audience members must expend cognitive energy when trying to comprehend the message (Feinberg, 1967; LaMarre, et al., 2009).

In the case of Stephen Colbert, it is highly likely that audience members will expend the majority of their cognitive effort on simply getting the joke, working to process the incongruity that exists between the script, Colbert's character, and the primary frame of reference (*i.e.,* electoral politics). Significantly less cognitive energy should be spent scrutinizing Colbert's argument that the McCain campaign is akin to "a flaming bag of dog poop dropped on America's doorstep," especially for those lacking the ability or motivation to closely inspect Colbert's claims (Colbert, 2008, October 29). In a related vein, given Colbert's visibility and popularity, it makes sense that viewers would be more likely to simply agree with the crux of Colbert's message rather than

engage in the practice of message discounting, especially given the likeability of the comedic source. As such, it is reasonable to assume that viewers' attitudes will more closely align with Colbert's perspective after exposure to his brand of hostile other-directed humor, especially when compared to those exposed to more serious, straight news content. Given the foregoing discussion, a first hypothesis is put forth:

H1. Exposure to other-directed will be associated with more negative attitudes toward the comic target.

Self-Mockery and Saturday Night Live

While Colbert's satire is a form of other-directed hostile humor, McCain's self-mockery can be characterized as "genuinely funny humor" because it is "largely self-directed and defensive" (Lefcourt, 2001, p. 72). More specifically, Lefcourt (2001) argues, "this self-directed humor would be an example of perspective-taking humor. It invites us to laugh at ourselves and to take ourselves less seriously" (p. 73). In contrast, the other-directed humor of Colbert and fellow comedians is less forgiving. In fact, work in psychology has argued that self-directed humor is associated with the perception of being "more human" and can encourage group solidarity (Lefcourt, 2001). In their study on ridicule or "jeer pressure," for example, Janes & Olson (2000) found that the intention of a joke is often more important than the actual content. Results from their experiments show that those exposed to other-ridicule humor, or jokes made at the expense of others, were more likely to seek conformity and less likely to reject the humorous content -- choosing to simply agree with the presented joke (Janes & Olson, 2000). In contrast,

those exposed to self-ridicule were more likely to find the joke to be good-natured rather than critical and were thus less likely to feel a need to have their opinions agree with the negative sentiment of the joke.

Applying the discussion of the processing of humorous political content to an analysis of McCain's self-ridicule on *Saturday Night Live,* it seems reasonable to suggest that viewers will expend most of their cognitive energy simply trying to get the joke, similar to the dynamic present with the Colbert clip. Effort expended to process the frame shift from McCain as politician to McCain as a comic figure should displace any effort that might have been expended on dissecting the material presented in McCain's comic performance (Coulson, 2001; Young, 2008). While the perceived credibility of McCain as a comic source and his inherent likeability may differ depending upon an individual's partisan orientation, it is also reasonable to suggest that audience members will appreciate McCain's departure from serious politics to present himself as fodder for political comedy.

While it is unclear whether McCain's *Saturday Night Live* performance will have any long-term persuasive effects, it is clear that viewers should at least view McCain in a more favorable light in the short-term. At the same time, given the high visibility and viral reach of candidate appearances on *Saturday Night Live* during the fall 2008 election season, it is possible that McCain's appearance could have some stopping as well as staying power. In light of this discussion, the following second hypothesis is put forth:

H2. Exposure to self-directed humor will be associated with more positive

attitudes toward the comic target.

Partisanship as a Moderator of Exposure

Finally, an analysis of political humor's influence on political attitudes during the 2008 campaign would be incomplete without a consideration of political partisanship, or partisan identification. Previous research on the political effects of late-night comedy has suggested that partisanship can moderate the impact of exposure to political comedy on related attitudes. For example, Young (2004) found that opinion effects related to exposure to jokes about Gore and Bush on network late-night television were moderated by partisanship and political knowledge. More recently work by Xenos, Moy, and Becker (2009) found that political partisanship moderated the effects of exposure to critical content from *The Daily Show*. In their study, Republican viewers actually warmed toward Nancy Pelosi and the Congressional Democrats after watching critical content from *The Daily Show*, while the attitudes of Democrats and Independents cooled towards the Speaker and her party after exposure to the same critical content. Similarly, recent work has shown that perceptions of comedy's persuasive power differ depending upon the partisan leanings of the viewer (A. B. Becker, et al., in press).

In fact, early work on humor appreciation privileges a disposition theory of humor, suggesting that the reception of humorous content depends in part on the audience member's orientation toward the comic target. Work by Zillmann and colleagues suggests that viewers should have greater appreciation for material that pokes fun at an opponent or less-liked source, and be less receptive to content that mocks someone they like or support (Zillmann, Bryant, & Cantor, 1974; Zillmann & Cantor, 1972, 1976). As a final point of investigation, it is therefore important to consider whether Republican and

Democratic viewers interpret political comedy featuring Republican candidates as either targets or actors differentially. As such, the following second research question is considered:

RQ2. To what extent does partisanship moderate attitudes that result from exposure to political humor?

Data and Methods

Participants and Design

To test the hypotheses and examine the research questions outlined above, an interactive experiment was conducted during the spring of 2009 at two large public universities in the United States using the MediaLab software platform. Students were recruited from classes in the communications departments on both campuses, and also from political science and marketing courses in the Midwest, and were eligible to receive a small amount of extra course credit in return for their participation in the study. In the Midwest, a total of 313 undergraduates participated in a six condition experiment between April 8 -21, 2009. In the South, 186 undergraduates participated in a four-condition experiment from April 20 – May 7, 2009. Combined, 499 undergraduates participated in the study over an approximately four-week long field period. The uniform MediaLab platform insured that all subjects received the same experimental environment and used the same technology throughout the study on each campus. More importantly, using MediaLab allowed for the successful replication of four experimental conditions at a second university campus.

Procedures and Stimuli

At each university, sessions began with a standard consent form that described the study as an investigation of "Perceptions of Online Video Content." Students in the Midwest were then randomly assigned to one of six conditions by the software program, while students in the South were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Each condition began with the same pre-test questionnaire that included measures of media exposure, political interest, media learning, and general political knowledge. The four conditions replicated across both universities each featured a different video clip focusing on the final days of the McCain-Palin 2008 presidential campaign. The first condition (n = 96) received a clip of McCain mocking his campaign on *Saturday Night Live*, the second condition (n = 103) received a clip of Stephen Colbert making fun of the McCain campaign on the October 29, 2008 broadcast of *The Colbert Report*, the third condition (n = 115) received a straight-news video clip with John Harwood of the *New York Times* discussing the outlook for the final days of the McCain-Palin campaign, and the fourth condition (n = 88) received a video clip compilation of five attack ads targeted at the McCain-Palin campaign during the final weeks of the election cycle. Edited only for length, each of the four video clips was approximately two and a half minutes long.

These first four conditions made it possible to examine the effect of exposure to varied forms of political humor (*i.e.,* other-directed hostile humor vs. self ridicule) on related political attitudes, while offering a direct contrast with more serious content (*i.e.,* straight news and political attack advertisements). In fact, the political attack ads, long a staple of competitive election campaigns, served as another example of hostile or vicious

content (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995). Unlike the other-directed humor of Colbert, however, the ads focused more heavily on issue content and only featured the most vicious of personal character attacks. The straight news clip served as a representation of more traditional or standard news fare – it was neither vicious nor funny – and provided an objective, unbiased evaluation of the final days of the McCain campaign. The straight news clip served as a reference point or benchmark in the analyses; the effects of exposure to the comedy and ads conditions were measured against exposure to this standard news video clip.

In the Midwest, two additional conditions were included to enable a test of the effects of exposure to political parody on relevant political attitudes, and serve as the focus of another related study. Subjects in this first additional condition ($n = 49$) watched a five and a half minute video clip of Tina Fey's parody of the Palin-Couric television interview that aired on *Saturday Night Live* on September 27, 2008. Subjects in the second additional condition ($n = 48$) watched a five and a half minute video clip from Sarah Palin's actual September 2008 television interview with CBS' Katie Couric. Both clips focused on similar issues and topics and were only edited to achieve comparable length.

Following the initial video clips, participants in all six conditions were then asked a first set of post-test questions measuring stimulus clip retention, opinions toward controversial political issues (*e.g.,* gay marriage, global warming, and stem cell research), and feelings toward six leading politicians: Barack Obama, John McCain, Joe Biden, Sarah Palin, Hillary Clinton, and Nancy Pelosi. Next, participants were exposed to a six-

minute video clip from a recent segment on PBS' *News Hour with Jim Lehrer* on the growing number of homeless school children in a mid-sized midwestern city. This clip was used as a contrast to the initial stimulus material and was part of an examination of political learning that is the focus of another study. After this second video clip, participants concluded the study by answering a final set of post-test questions measuring news clip recall, trust in government and the media, political efficacy, and key demographic considerations.

Experimental studies allow researchers to better understand theory given a change in communication conditions, carefully control variation, and isolate key concepts of interest (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Hovland, 1951; Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949). While some researchers focus primarily on designing experiments to achieve surface representativeness or close comparison to real environmental conditions, well-designed experiments achieve external validity by approximating real world conditions and by offering tests of underlying theoretical concepts that are designed to be both easily replicated and to help us to better understand social meaning and behavior (Shapiro, 2002). The advantage of relying on an experimental rather than survey design is that experiments can isolate key causal factors, easily manipulate the presence or absence of a stimuli, estimate the true effect of exposure rather than rely on erroneous measures of self-reported media exposure, and hold other causes or variables constant (Iyengar, forthcoming). Put slightly differently, the experiment featured here allowed for a more isolated, specific test of key message elements (*i.e.,* other-directed vs. self-directed

humor) and enabled a true test of the effects of exposure to particular stimuli (Iyengar, forthcoming).

While the chosen stimuli represented the best clips from the 2008 election cycle tapping the other-directed vs. self-directed humor distinction, it is important to recognize that they are not perfect stimuli. It is possible that subjects may have found both clips funny, failing to see Colbert's performance as truly hostile given pre-existing perceptions of *The Colbert Report* or prior experience viewing the show. This would introduce a hostile vs. funny confound into the study design. At the same time, a simple manipulation check showed that those who viewed the self-directed humor clip found it to be entertaining, funny, persuasive rather than informative, and importantly, much less negative than the Colbert other-directed humor clip. Those who viewed the Colbert clip indicated that they found the video to be negative first and foremost, then entertaining, funny, and persuasive rather than informative.

While the video clips feature the same criticisms and jokes about McCain and were originally aired during the last ten days of the election cycle, it is important to acknowledge that the stimuli are not drawn from the same comedy program. Some would suggest that the ideal scenario would have exposed subjects to Colbert making fun of John McCain and then McCain making fun of himself on *The Colbert Report*. The reality, however, is that *The Colbert Report* does not offer a viable platform for candidate appearances during the final days of an election cycle. In sum, since the clips reflect how humor works in a competitive election cycle, they achieve external and ecological validity, and provide a truly realistic comparison of content. Methodologically speaking,

these experimental studies offered an excellent forum through which to explore relevant theoretical questions and test well-formed hypotheses (for a more detailed discussion of ecological validity concerns, see Chapter 6). The relevant measures used in the analyses are outlined below.

Key Measures

Political Interest. Interest in following matters related to politics and government ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 1.11$ was measured on a five-point scale (1 = "never," 2 = "hardly at all," 3 = "only now and then 4= "some of the time," 5 = "most of the time). Those who indicated that they were "never" interested in matters related to politics and government were recoded as "0" in the dataset.

Partisanship. Two measures of political partisanship were used in the analyses: party identification and political ideology. Subjects were asked to select their party identification based on the following scale: (1 = "Democrat," 2 = "Republican," 3 = "Independent," and 4 = "Something else/none of these"). This measure was then re-coded for use in the analyses that follow (1= "Democrat," 0 = "all others"). The final sample was 44% Democrat, 38% Republican, and 17 % Independent or other. Interestingly, the midwestern campus was 64% Democrat, 20% Republican and 16% Independent, while the campus in the South was 22% Democrat, 59% Republican, and 19% Independent. Political ideology ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.64$) was based on a single-item measure of self-reported political ideology. Responses ranged from (1 = "Strong liberal," to 7 = "Strong

conservative"). Students in the Midwest were less conservative (M = 3.25, SD = 1.49) than students in the South (M = 4.88, SD = 1.34).

Feelings Toward Politicians. A series of post-test questions asked subjects to indicate their general attitude or feelings toward six politicians using standard 100-point ANES feeling thermometers: (1) President Barack Obama, (2) Vice President Joe Biden, (3) Senator John McCain, (4) Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, (5) Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and (6) Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. The analyses that follow include a feeling thermometer measure for Senator John McCain (M = 53.40, SD = 24.62) as the dependent variable since he was the target of the comedic video clips and ad content and the main focus of the straight news story.

Demographics. Finally, a few demographic items were included in the study to account for any variation that might exist in the subject pool, both within and across university campuses. Key measures used in the analyses presented in this paper include gender (the combined dataset was 32% male; 68% female) and age (combined M =21.04, SD = 1.53)[1].

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[1] Subjects participating in the experiment were also asked to indicate their race or ethnicity. Unfortunately, most of the subgroups were so small (*i.e.,* under 30 respondents) that they did not encourage meaningful statistical analyses. That said, a subsequent review of the data showed that the findings did not differ significantly when ethnicity or race was included as a control variable. In the end, the analyses included a control variable for campus location to capture any diversity, both in terms of ethnic and ideological differences that were unique to each university setting.

Results

A series of analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses and explore the research questions outlined above. A first set of analyses focused on examining the impact of exposure to the experimental stimuli on attitudes toward John McCain across conditions. An analysis of the variance (ANOVA) in mean feeling thermometer ratings for McCain by condition was considered, along with an analysis of the variance in mean ratings for McCain by condition, controlling for partisan identification (*e.g.,* Democrats and Republicans). As a follow-up, comparisons of mean feeling thermometer ratings for John McCain by condition and for McCain by condition, controlling for partisan identification, were also considered. Second, a hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression examined what factors directly influenced attitudes toward John McCain, taking demographics, political predispositions, and treatment effects into account. As a follow-up to this second analysis, a series of hierarchical OLS regression models considered both the direct effects and any interaction effects that might help to further explain variation in political attitudes or feelings toward John McCain.

To explore the impact of the experimental stimuli on attitudes toward McCain, a series of one-way ANOVA analyses considered whether attitudes toward McCain differed significantly across all conditions, looking first at the total sample and then evaluating both Democrats and Republicans separately. Table 2.1 displays the results from these one-way ANOVA analyses, presenting significant results for the total sample $F(3,397) = 2.63, p < .05, \eta = .02$, and also for Democrats $F(3,174) = 2.81, p < .05, \eta = .05$, showing that attitudes toward McCain do differ significantly across experimental

conditions and that the effect is stronger for Democrats than for Republicans. These initial findings are directly relevant to *RQ1* and offer interesting insight with respect to *RQ2*, essentially suggesting that diverse forms of comedy may differentially influence political attitudes and that political partisanship may moderate the impact of political humor on related candidate evaluations.

[Insert Table 2.1 about here.]

As a follow-up, Table 2.2 displays the mean thermometer ratings for McCain by condition for the total sample, and for McCain by condition for Democrats and then for Republicans. As Table 2.2 shows, Colbert's other-directed humor cools attitudes toward McCain for the total sample and for both Democrats and Republicans, but has a larger negative effect on the attitudes of Democrats. Essentially, Table 2.2 suggests that Democrats' attitudes toward McCain are more susceptible to the effects of Colbert's hostile humor, while the attitudes of Republicans are less vulnerable to the comic presentation. At the same time, the self-directed humor of John McCain's performance on *Saturday Night Live* warms attitudes for the total sample and for Democrats and Republicans, but this warming effect is less pronounced than the cooling effect associated with Colbert. More specifically, the data in Table 2.2 show that Democrats exposed to Colbert's other-directed humor have feeling thermometer ratings for John McCain that are seven points lower on average compared to all Democrats participating in the study, while Republicans exposed to Colbert's other-directed humor have feeling thermometer ratings for John McCain that are four points lower on average compared to all Republicans participating in the study. At the same time, Democrats who viewed

McCain's self-directed performance on *SNL* have feeling thermometer ratings for John

McCain that are only four points higher on average compared to all Democrats

participating in the study, while Republicans exposed to McCain's self-directed

performance on *SNL* have feeling thermometer ratings for John McCain that are only two

points higher on average compared to all Republicans participating in the study. These

findings lend support for both *H1* and *H2* by first highlighting the negative relationship

that exists between exposure to other-directed hostile humor and attitudes toward John

McCain, and second by suggesting that exposure to self-directed humor has a positive

effect on candidate attitudes. Separate from this, it is also interesting to note that

Democrats cool toward McCain after viewing attack ads, while on average, Republican

viewers warm toward the candidate.

[Insert Table 2.2 about here.]

Table 2.3 displays the upon-entry and final standardized regression coefficients

for the first hierarchical OLS regression analysis examining variation in attitudes toward

McCain. Hierarchical regression enters blocks of variables based on their assumed causal

order, measuring the relative contribution of each variable block above and beyond

previously entered blocks. The upon-entry beta coefficients control for all variables

entered into the model in the previous blocks as well as the other variables that were

entered within the same block. The contribution of each subsequent block to explaining

the variance in the dependent variable, attitudes toward McCain, is listed as the

incremental R^2. The sum of the incremental R-squares is listed as the Final R^2, or the

percent of the variance in the dependent variable, attitudes toward McCain, that is explained by the full model.

[Insert Table 2.3 about here.]

As Table 2.3 shows, demographic and location variables explained a significant percentage of the variance in the dependent variable, attitudes toward John McCain, initially (incremental R^2 of 2.6% and 11.1% respectively). However, the effect of demographics and location weakened as other variable blocks were inserted into the model.

The third block of the regression model, incorporating political predispositions (*e.g.,* partisan identification, political ideology, and political interest) represented the largest incremental increase in R^2, and displayed a significant, negative relationship between partisan identification, or in this case being a Democrat, and attitudes toward John McCain ($\beta = -.32, p < .001$), and a significant, positive relationship between political ideology, or in this case being more conservative, and attitudes toward John McCain ($\beta = .33, p < .001$).

The fourth and final block of the regression analysis incorporated the experimental conditions into the model in order to test for any treatment effects that might be present having already controlled for other factors like demographics, partisan identification, and political ideology. Using the straight news condition as the point of reference, the fourth variable block incorporated dummy variables for the *Saturday Night Live*, *Colbert Report*, and attack advertisement conditions. The results suggest that those exposed to the other-directed humor of Stephen Colbert were significantly less likely to

positively evaluate John McCain (β = -.16, p < .001) even after controlling for predispositional factors like partisan identification or political ideology. Interestingly, those exposed to the attack ads were also significantly less likely to positively evaluate John McCain (β = -.09 p < 05), but the analysis failed to offer evidence of a significant positive relationship between exposure to self-directed humor and resulting attitudes toward John McCain. An inspection of the unstandardized regression coefficients for each of the experimental conditions showed that those exposed to Colbert's other-directed humor had subsequent feeling thermometer evaluations of McCain that were more than nine points lower on average than those exposed to the straight news condition (b = -9.19, SE = 2.68). Further, those exposed to the attack ads had feeling thermometer evaluations of McCain that were more than five points lower on average that those exposed to the straight news condition (b = -5.59, SE = 2.75) while those who viewed McCain's self-directed performance on *SNL* were just slightly more likely to offer more negative evaluations of McCain than those exposed to the straight news control (b = -1.56, SE = 2.68). Together, this fourth and final block of the regression model explained an additional 2.2% of the variance in the dependent variable, attitudes toward John McCain, and offered evidence of a significant treatment effect for those randomly assigned to the other-directed humor or *Colbert Report* and attack advertisement conditions. This finding offers direct support for *H1*, highlighting a negative relationship between exposure to other-directed humor and attitudes toward McCain. Unfortunately, *H2* was not supported by the data given the lack of a significant positive relationship between exposure to self-directed humor and attitudes toward McCain. The significant

coefficient for the ads condition suggests that being exposed to hostile yet unfunny content can also have a negative impact on resulting candidate evaluations. Overall, the final regression model explains 42.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, attitudes toward John McCain.

Given the importance of partisan identification and political ideology in explaining variation in support for John McCain, a series of interaction terms were created to see if these political predispositions acted as perceptual filters, moderating the influence of the experimental stimuli on evaluations of McCain. By multiplying the standardized values of key main effect variables, two sets of interaction terms were constructed for use in additional regression analyses: (1) the interaction between partisan identification (*i.e.,* being a Democrat) and stimulus condition (*Saturday Night Live*, *Colbert Report*, or attack ads) and (2) the interaction between political ideology (*i.e.,* being conservative) and stimulus condition.

Table 2.4 displays the results from a series of follow-up hierarchical OLS regressions that considered both the direct effects and any interaction effects that might help to better explain what factors influenced attitudes toward John McCain. The main effects included in block 1 of the model account for 42.9% of the variance in attitudes toward John McCain, while the interaction terms in block 2 only account for a combined additional 0.7% of the variance in evaluations of McCain. Overall, this larger model explains 43.6% of the variance in attitudes toward John McCain and fails to offer evidence of any significant interaction effects between partisan identification, political ideology, and stimulus condition. In other words, the findings presented in Table 2.4

suggest that political predispositions (*e.g.,* partisanship, ideology) did not moderate the attitudes that result from being exposed to political humor. More specifically, the results suggest that exposure to Stephen Colbert's other-directed humor had a direct, negative effect on evaluations of John McCain, irrespective of an individual's partisan identification or political ideology. The relative non-findings from the series of follow-up hierarchical OLS regressions displayed in Table 2.4 offer insight with respect to *RQ2* and provide further support for *H1*.

[Insert Table 2.4 about here.]

Interestingly, the influence of partisanship does not show up in the regression interactions presented in Table 2.4, but does emerge as a significant factor in the ANOVA analyses. This finding suggests that partisanship may actually serve as a perceptual filter in some cases, moderating the influence of the experimental stimuli on evaluations of McCain, but that this effect is not strong or concentrated enough to emerge as an interaction effect in the follow-up regression analyses displayed in Table 2.4. This finding offers interesting insight with respect to *RQ2* and suggests that partisanship does have at least some moderating effect on the processing of political humor, but that the main effect of exposure to differential forms of political humor is strong and direct and relatively impervious to moderation by political partisanship. Realistically, political partisanship may moderate the impact of exposure to differential forms of political humor for the most devoted and ideologically charged partisans, but may prove negligible for viewers who have moderate or even modest attachments to particular political parties.

Taken together, the findings suggest that exposure to political comedy can have a significant impact on political attitudes, but that this impact depends in part upon the form of political comedy presented. The hostile other-directed humor of Stephen Colbert had more of an effect on the political attitudes of both Democrats and Republicans than the friendlier, self-directed humor presented in John McCain's guest appearance on *Saturday Night Live*. In addition, being exposed to hostile attack ads also had a direct, negative effect on evaluations of John McCain. At the same time, the results suggest that political partisanship can moderate the impact of exposure to political comedy on political attitudes. The findings show that Democrats were more receptive to Colbert's hostile other-directed humor, while Republicans were less sympathetic. Finally, Democrats cooled toward McCain after viewing the attack ads, while the attitudes of Republicans warmed toward their party's candidate. With respect to the other-directed humor condition, it is possible that Democrats cooled towards McCain after viewing the clip in part because they were more receptive to Colbert's hostile message from the outset than Republicans viewers and were thus inherently less likely to counterargue Colbert's critical perspective, or because Democrats find Colbert a more credible source than Republican viewers.

Discussion

This study sought to augment existing research on the political effects of late-night comedy by considering how individual perceptions and processing of political comedy differ given exposure to various forms or types of humor. Responding to the call

by Holbert (2005) to consider the unique properties of various comedy types, the analysis partitioned political comedy into two categories: 1) other-directed humor, or more traditional attempts at hostile political satire, and 2) self-directed humor, or less conventional attempts at political humor, in which the target of the satire is also the satirist. In addition, the study featured video stimuli from *The Colbert Report* and *Saturday Night Live*, programs that have received considerably less scholarly attention than *The Daily Show* or network late-night comedy programs like *Late Night with David Letterman* and *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*.

Before concluding, it is important to point out some of the limitations of the current study. The data used in the analyses is taken from a series of experiments with university students. While these younger individuals represent the heart of the political comedy audience, it is important to point out that the results are not representative of the larger population. Barack Obama won a disproportionate share of the youth vote in 2008, which suggests that young people may possess more negative attitudes toward McCain from the outset than older voters. Moreover, young people watch less television than their older counterparts and are generally more receptive to the snark and sarcasm of political comedy programs than older viewers. In fact, the results particular to this younger sample group may actually reflect an attenuated view of the relationships between exposure to political comedy and related political attitudes given young viewers' comfort with and high levels of exposure to political comedy. In a sense, the results presented here are complicated by the problem of nonresponse, offering a partial picture of the relationships that exist between exposure to diverse forms of comedy and related political attitudes

(Brehm, 1993). Despite the skewed nature of the student sample, the results still highlight the underlying relationships that exist between exposure to diverse forms of political comedy and resulting political attitudes (Basil, 1996; Shapiro, 2002). At the same time, and while somewhat speculative, it is still reasonable to suggest that the impact of exposure to diverse forms of comedy may have an even more pronounced, differential effect on older viewers who are less familiar and comfortable with political humor.

In addition, it is important to note that the experiment was conducted in a lab setting, which while useful for successfully replicating the study across two campuses, is not reflective of the typical, more casual viewing environment. While lab studies have become the standard for political communications research, they still represent an artificial environment at best and feature an all too "captive" an audience (Hovland, 1959; Iyengar, forthcoming). Further, the experiment examines political attitudes after exposure to one short stimulus clip. As such, the data does not measure the impact of prolonged or repeated exposure to political comedy and is unable to determine whether the other-directed humor of Stephen Colbert or McCain's self-directed humor has a sleeper effect, becoming more influential and more persuasive over time. Future research should consider the effects of both temporary and more chronic exposure to political comedy (Young, 2006). Finally, it is worth noting that the field period for the study was almost six months after Election Day, with subjects participating in the lab during the months of April and May 2009. It is possible that subjects might have had stronger reactions to the material if presented prior to Election Day, during the height of the

competitive presidential campaign when McCain was a competitor and active threat to the Obama campaign. At the same time, evidence of significant findings here, six months after the election, points to the idea that these comedy forms may have had an even larger, differential effect on political attitudes in the fall of 2008.

With any experimental study, there are concerns about the ecological validity of the findings. This study focused on investigating the differential impact of diverse comedy forms on political attitudes, contrasting other-directed humor, or traditional hostile political satire, with the less conventional form of self-directed humor. The investigation focuses on an overall pattern of effects and does not analyze the impact of different segments of the comedic stimuli in finite detail. While it is possible that particular segments of the clips may have had a more pronounced impact on candidate evaluations or that similar themes in each of the video stimuli may have encouraged particular attitudinal responses, the results still speak to a larger pattern of comedy processing effects. Moreover, by using one clip in each condition, the experiment favored an environment of controlled variation, overshadowing concerns of a potential case-category confound (Hovland, 1951; Polk, et al., 2009). While some might suggest that a more robust test of the differential impacts of diverse forms of humor should include exposure to more than one self-directed and other-directed humor clip, doing so would have created too much variability within the experimental design. Nevertheless, it is clear that future research should incorporate a study of more micro-level effects that are related to exposure to diverse comedic forms and also focus on expanding the number of stimuli featured in controlled experimental designs. Finally, it is important to note the straight

news condition was treated as the control cell in the analyses, rather than a pure control cell that did not feature any video stimuli. While some might object to the lack of a pure control cell, the use of the straight news condition in this design reflects the reality that straight news is still the standard fare presented during competitive election campaigns and that some news exposure is more reflective of reality than being situated within a total news vacuum.

It is also possible that the significant treatment effects outlined above may be related to larger patterns of political comedy exposure and media consumption. Subjects who were more responsive to the humorous video stimuli present in the experiment may either be heavy or light comedy viewers and their attitudinal responses may just be proportional to the amount of comedy content present in their existing media diet. To examine this potential confound, a post-hoc series of hierarchical regression models that also incorporated prior measures of media exposure by content type (e.g., cable comedy, network comedy, cable news, network news) were evaluated. The models offered evidence of significant treatment effects even after controlling for demographics, political predispositions, and prior patterns of media consumption, but did not highlight direct significant relationships between prior patterns of media exposure by content type and the dependent variable, attitudes toward McCain. It is therefore safe to conclude that exposure to the varied humorous experimental stimuli did have a significant impact on political attitudes and candidate evaluations that is separate from the effects that may be related to more general patterns of media consumption.

Lastly, it is important to point out that the dependent variable, attitudes toward John McCain, was based on a standard 100-point ANES feeling thermometer measure. While feeling thermometer measures serve as reliable, baseline measures of support for or feelings toward a particular politician or candidate, it is important to point out that these measures represent generalizable, crude sentiments at best. Future research should move beyond the feeling thermometer measure, capturing more nuanced evaluations of political actors, asking respondents to offer judgments of the candidate's competence and issue expertise along with evaluations of personality and style.

Despite these limitations, the results suggest that different comedy forms have a differential impact on related political attitudes. Both Democrats and Republicans warm to McCain after viewing his self-directed comic presentation on *Saturday Night Live*, yet they cool towards McCain after viewing Colbert's other-directed hostile humor. McCain's self-directed humor helps to humanize the candidate and allows audience members to laugh along *with* him, while Colbert's heavily constructed attack simply encourages viewers to laugh *at* McCain. While it seems that on the whole audience members see both Stephen Colbert and John McCain as credible sources, partisan political preferences seem to moderate the impact of exposure to these comic stimuli on political attitudes, significantly so in the case of Colbert's other-directed hostile humor.

While the findings of the study do suggest that political partisanship can moderate the impact of exposure to political comedy on political attitudes, it is clear that more research needs to address the impact of both partisan identification and political ideology on the processing of political humor. At present it seems that critical comedy has a larger

cooling effect on the attitudes of those whose party affiliation or politics differ from the comic target. At the same time, the results seem to suggest that self-directed humor designed to make the satirized, or politician, appear more human has a larger warming effect on the attitudes of those who share the same political affiliation. Of course, this type of analysis excludes political independents or moderates who make up a large portion of the political comedy audience. Future research needs to consider the impact of political comedy on both partisan and more neutral audience members.

While the results begin to shed some light on the differential impact of particular comedy forms on related political attitudes, it is clear that future research is needed in order to more precisely pinpoint the mechanisms that underlie the processing of a whole variety of political comedy forms. Future research should incorporate the analysis of political parody, or an "imitation, intended to ridicule or to criticize" an original event or action (i.e., a political debate, convention speech, media appearance) into a larger study of the processing of political humor (Kreuz & Roberts, 1993, p. 102; Rossen-Knill & Henry, 1997). Similarly, while the regression analyses offered evidence of negative relationship between exposure to the ads condition and attitudes toward John McCain, the extent to which this form of hostile, yet serious content can differentially influence political attitudes, especially when part of a media diet that includes multiple comic forms, is unclear. Future research may benefit from exploring the impact of various types of hostile content -- both funny and serious -- on political attitudes.

While John McCain's attempts to poke fun at himself and his campaign in his guest appearances on *Saturday Night Live* seemed to work in this instance, suggesting

that politicians who engage in self-directed humor can actually help rather than hurt their candidacies, it is not clear that attempts at self-directed humor will work for all politicians. It may be that self-directed humor only benefits candidates running for president given the heightened visibility of the presidential campaign. In fact, self-directed humor may not work for candidates running for down ballot races – those who are ultimately less familiar to the American public. In addition, the success of self-directed humor may depend on the timing of the comic presentation. John McCain appeared on *Saturday Night Live* on the final weekend before Election Day. His routine was timely and managed to make the tense final days of the presidential campaign seem a bit more light-hearted. Had McCain made fun of himself during the early days of the campaign, he could have potentially done more harm than good. In addition, it is not clear whether self-directed humor can benefit politicians like Dan Quayle, Dennis Kucinich, or Sarah Palin, candidates who have been more constant targets of the other-directed humor of cable satire hosts Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert and network late night comedians like Jay Leno and David Letterman. Finally, it is not clear whether self-directed humor can work for both male and female politicians, or if the comic form better suits one gender.

The other-directed hostile humor of Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart, David Letterman, Jay Leno, and others still dominates the world of late-night political comedy. Whether good or bad, appearances like John McCain's stint on *Saturday Night Live* are often few and far between. At the same time, it is clear that the viral reach of these self-directed comic performances is growing, with more Americans viewing the material on

web sites like YouTube and through their DVRs than during the original television broadcasts. Over time, as the audience for self-directed political humor grows, appearances like John McCain's may "sock it to" the hostile other-directed humor of comedians like Stephen Colbert. Only time will tell whether these humorous forms will have a sleeper effect, or a delayed longer-term effect on political attitudes. It is clear, however, that both other-directed and self-directed humor will play a role in the election cycles to come and that it will be important for candidates to perfect the art of poking fun at themselves.

CHAPTER 3: POLITICAL HUMOR AS DEMOCRATIC RELIEF? TRUST,
EFFICACY, AND THE POST-BROADCAST MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

Traditionally, research on late night political comedy has focused on examining

two related concerns: 1) the mechanisms that underlie the processing of politically

humorous content, and 2) the political effects of exposure to relevant content. While

recent work has argued that scholars need to focus more heavily on applying processing

mechanisms to the study of political comedy, thus advancing a more theoretically

coherent body of research on political entertainment, interest in understanding the

political effects of exposure to political humor abounds (Young, 2008). In fact, recent

studies have connected exposure to late night political comedy with an increased

likelihood to engage in particular forms of political participation, higher levels of internal

political efficacy, and increasing levels of political knowledge and learning, especially

among the politically inattentive (Baum, 2003b; Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Cao,

2008; Cao & Brewer, 2008; Holbert, et al., 2007; Hollander, 2005; Kim & Vishak, 2008;

Moy, Xenos, et al., 2005; Xenos & Becker, 2009). As scholars begin to pick apart the

particulars of the 2008 election cycle, it is clear that the fires of this "explosion of

research examining the effects of late-night comedy on public attitudes toward politics"

will only continue to burn (Morris, 2009, p. 79)

Without question, a study of the mechanisms that underlie the processing of political humor should allow us "to consider humorous texts as more than just another input variable in a media effects equation" (Young, 2008, p. 133). However, given rapidly changing political dynamics, it is still important to focus on the media effects side of the equation, continually updating our understanding of the range of political and behavioral effects that are connected with exposure to political comedy programming. At the same time, a valid media effects equation needs to account for both the diversity of politically humorous texts and the reality that political humor is just one part of an increasingly rich and varied news and entertainment media diet.

Using data from experimental studies conducted in the spring of 2009 with undergraduates from two large public universities, this pilot study seeks to update the standard political comedy media effects equation in three distinct ways. First, various humorous texts are considered in context -- from network late-night talk shows, to late-night cable satires, to online humor from sources like *The Onion, Funny or Die*, or *Jib Jab,* to the political parody of *Saturday Night Live* -- in an attempt to account for the diversity of politically humorous content available during the 2008 election cycle. Second, the impact of political humor programming is considered alongside a range of other news media options, recognizing that young viewers who tune into late night comedy are also paying considerable attention to news content from more traditional sources like cable and network television news (Feldman & Young, 2008; Young & Tisinger, 2006). Third, rather than look at one political effect of interest in isolation, like cynicism or participation, this investigation pairs an examination of political trust with an

examination of internal political efficacy, acknowledging the connections that exist between the two core concepts. Taken together, this pilot study seeks to push the field toward a more inclusive and robust version of the political comedy media effects equation.

Political Humor and the 2008 Election

Voters seemed to have their pick of political comedy content during the 2008 primary and general election season. From *Saturday Night Live* parodies, to fake news segments on *The Daily Show*, to Stephen Colbert's *Better Know a District*, to mock campaign coverage from the print edition of *The Onion* and its online radio and video counterparts, to interviews on network late-night comedy shows like *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* or *Late Night with David Letterman*, to viral YouTube, *Funny or Die*, and *JibJab* video content, the 2008 media environment was chock-full of funny commentary on the state of electoral politics. Rather than simply rely on more traditional news sources for campaign coverage, a significant number of Americans, especially those under 30, turned toward these more avant-garde or unconventional forms of media to learn about politics and public affairs (Pew, 2008b). In addition, young Americans looked to the Internet for political updates, using social networking sites like Facebook or MySpace, and online viral videos posted on YouTube as primary sources of campaign information.

According to a 2004 report by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 8% of Americans, and 21% of Americans under 30 said they regularly learned something about politics and public affairs from comedy shows like *The Daily Show* and

Saturday Night Live (Pew, 2004). In late 2007 and early 2008, during the height of the Writers Guild of America strike, a smaller percentage of those under 30 (12% compared to 8% of the total population) said they learned something about the presidential campaign from comedy programs (Pew, 2008b). Moreover, slightly more than one quarter of Americans (28%) felt like they were missing out on campaign information because late-night comedy programs were on hiatus (Pew, 2008b). Interestingly, 8% of Americans said they got information on campaigns and candidates from news satire websites like *The Onion* or *The Daily Show*. While this percentage may seem low, it mirrors the percentage of Americans (8%) who said they visited candidate web sites to gather campaign or candidate information (Pew, 2008b).

In retrospect, it has become clear that the memorable antics of *Saturday Night Live's* Tina Fey (as Sarah Palin), the political satire of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, and user generated You Tube content left an indelible impression upon the American electorate in the fall of 2008. In fact, according to an October 29, 2008 Pew News Interest Index Report: "more than half of the public (56%) heard a lot about Palin's appearance on 'Saturday Night Live,' while 14% heard a little about this. As many Americans said they heard about Palin's SNL appearance as said they heard about her being chosen as John McCain's running mate at the end of August" (Pew, 2008d). Never before had political comedy played such a pivotal role in shaping the election year media landscape.

Political Comedy in the Post-Broadcast Media Environment

The post-broadcast label is reflective of our new media environment, one that is driven by choice and competition. Viewers are no longer bound by the programming limitations of three major broadcast networks. Instead, media consumers can select from a variety of cable television, Internet, satellite television, and radio options. With this freedom of media choice comes the reality that viewers can select whether they prefer entertainment, news, reality, or sports programming, striking a balance between various elements of interest. The problem for political communication researchers, in particular Matt Baum and Markus Prior, is that for some media consumers, particularly members of what we have come to call the "inattentive public," consumption of news content is replaced by the preference for all things entertaining.

For Baum (2003a), the preference for entertainment over traditional news is not that alarming given the proliferation of soft news programs that address pressing political issues (particularly matters of foreign policy) and promote political knowledge gain, even if increases in political knowledge are an incidental by-product or accidental result of exposure to these soft news programs. In fact, Baum's research has consistently shown that exposure to soft news programming can promote a gateway effect, encouraging otherwise inattentive individuals to turn into more traditional news sources (Baum, 2003b). As a result, recent studies have found that soft news viewers can actually learn more about politics, political candidates, and engage in more consistent voting patterns (Baum, 2004, 2005; Baum & Jamison, 2006).

Prior (2007) takes a slightly different approach to the soft news question by suggesting that individuals strike a balance between their relative entertainment preference (REP) and their relative news preference (RNP). In Prior's view, soft news programs may encourage normally inattentive viewers to pay attention to politics, but soft news programs do not positively impact political learning (Prior, 2003). Thus from Prior's normative perspective, the proliferation of soft news programs, including political comedy, hurts rather than helps democracy (Prior, 2005).

Despite the ubiquitous presence of political humor during the 2008 election, it is important to remember that political comedy programming represents just one media option in a rich and varied post-broadcast environment. Previous research has debunked the myth that young viewers only get their political information from late-night comedy programming -- instead research has shown that young audiences tune into late-night comedy as well as more traditional news content, treating comedy as a supplement to, rather than replacement for, traditional news (Young & Tisinger, 2006). Furthermore, recent work has connected exposure to late-night comedy programming with increased attention to more traditional network and cable news content during the course of both the primary and general election cycle (Feldman & Young, 2008). In fact, Feldman and Young (2008) suggest that those who watch late-night comedy (and even more narrowly, network late-night comedy programs like *Leno* and *Letterman*) actually spend more time paying attention to traditional news during the course of an election cycle than those who do not watch any late-night comedy programming. This builds on the body of work by Baum (2003a, 2003b, 2004) discussed earlier, which suggests that exposure to soft news,

including late-night comedy, can have a gateway effect, encouraging those who are normally rather inattentive to in fact tune into serious news content. Moreover, a partiality toward soft news or late-night comedy programs does not preclude an interest in more traditional news content. Rather, it may simply suggest that an individual has a higher relative entertainment preference (REP) than a relative news preference (RNP), preferring to tune into entertaining or even soft news content before, but not instead of, traditional news content (Prior, 2005, 2007).

In effect, those who paint Jon Stewart and fellow comedians as sinners in the great "Church of Democracy," might be a bit off-base in their claims (Hart & Hartelius, 2007, p. 263). Rather than lambast Stewart and his fellow purveyors of late-night comedy for their critical presentation, researchers should answer the call of Holbert (2005) and consider the impact of these late-night comedy programs in context – realizing that young Americans are tuning into late-night comedy as well as more traditional broadcast and network news content when trying to gather political information. Rather than condemn political satire from the start, it might be more fruitful for scholars to evaluate the state of the mass media as a whole, especially given declining public trust in the institutions of the mainstream media (Lipset & Schneider, 1987; Moy & Pfau, 2000). Ultimately, it makes more sense to consider which of the many forms of post-broadcast media (*i.e.,* cable news, network evening news, late-night cable comedy, late-night network comedy) influence political variables of interest, recognizing that late-night comedy presents just one viable media option.

The Political Effects of Exposure to Late Night Comedy

Over the course of the past decade, research has connected exposure to soft news and political comedy with a selection of political variables of interest: political learning and knowledge, cynicism or a lack of trust in government, political participation, and internal political efficacy. For the most part, this research addresses each variable in isolation, choosing to focus on what is often the most popular or conveniently measured concept of interest. Moreover, much of this research has used single-item measures as proxies for more complicated effects constructs (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006). In an attempt to add depth to the body of research on the political effects of exposure to late-night comedy, this investigation seeks to look at two related political effects, political trust and internal efficacy, recognizing the mediating relationship that connects the two constructs. In addition, this research advances a more reliable, internally valid, and rigorous measure of internal political efficacy than has been put forth in previous research (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Holbert, et al., 2007).

Defining Political Trust

Broadly, political trust is defined as "the degree to which people perceive that government is producing outcomes consistent with their expectations" (Hetherington, 2005, p. 9). In its most basic form, political trust is measured as an individual's faith or confidence that they can *trust the government to do what is right*. First conceptualized in the early 1960s, there has been great debate over: 1) how researchers should measure political or government trust, 2) the relationship between declining levels of trust and

other political variables like participation or efficacy, and 3) the role of the media in influencing political trust (Hetherington, 1998; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Moy & Scheufele, 2000; Moy, Torres, Tanaka, & McCluskey, 2005; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). In recent years, declining levels of political trust have been shown to negatively influence political participation and promote a general cynicism toward the news media and institutions of government (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Moy, Torres, et al., 2005). Conversely, previous research has shown that higher levels of political trust are related to more positive evaluations of government (*i.e.,* less cynicism or higher levels of external efficacy) and higher rates of civic engagement and participation (Joslyn & Cigler, 2001; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). Central to the research questions explored in this study, prior work has shown that political trust can be used as a heuristic when processing media content -- with higher levels of trust in the government potentially mediating a response to critical media content (Hetherington, 1999; Joslyn, 2003). Taking all of this into account, this study advances a foundational conceptualization of political trust in the attempt to understand how exposure to various forms of media (including late-night comedy) influence an individual's basic faith in the institutions of government.

Defining Political Efficacy

Political efficacy has two conceptual dimensions: (1) external efficacy, or the belief that the leaders and institutions of government adequately represent citizen interests, and (2) internal efficacy, or individuals' "beliefs about one's own competence

to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics" (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990; Niemi, et al., 1991, p. 1407). Previous research has shown that higher levels of political efficacy are associated with greater rates of voter turnout and that higher levels of efficacy encourage political participation and engagement more generally (Joslyn & Cigler, 2001; McCluskey, Deshpande, Shah, & McLeod, 2004; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). In addition, external political efficacy, often labeled as political cynicism, is regularly connected with exposure to horserace journalism, or heavily framed media coverage that focuses on the game of politics, rather than the substance (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). For example, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) demonstrate that increased exposure to episodic media content, or event-driven coverage, leads to lower levels of external efficacy, especially when compared to exposure to thematic content or issue-driven coverage. Following the trajectory of recent research on the political effects of late-night comedy, this study focuses on the connection between exposure to media content and levels of internal efficacy, which is often seen as a precursor or antecedent to measures of external political efficacy or cynicism. In fact, the most recent research on the political effects of exposure to late-night comedy privileges internal political efficacy almost exclusively, foregoing a discussion of external political efficacy (Baym, 2005; Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Holbert, et al., 2007; Polk, et al., 2009). In an effort to build upon the current research trajectory, this study also focuses on internal rather than external political efficacy, recognizing that judgments of internal political efficacy often

subsequently and significantly influence evaluations of the institutions and leaders of government and their ability to adequately represent citizen interests and concerns.

Trust, Efficacy, Political Comedy, and the Post-Broadcast Media Environment

Research connecting political trust and exposure to late-night comedy remains fairly limited at this point, with greater interest and effort centering on exposure to late-night comedy and resulting measures of internal and external political efficacy. Interestingly, however, Baumgartner and Morris's (2006) measure of external political efficacy actually reflects a measure of political trust, or a lack of faith in government. The authors find that exposure to *The Daily Show* leads to lower levels of external efficacy or more cynical attitudes toward the institutions of government, yet they also show that exposure to *The Daily Show* has positive effects on levels of internal efficacy. Holbert et al. (2007) extend this area of inquiry further, finding that internal political efficacy acts as a moderator in the processing of media content, with low-efficacy individuals reporting weaker measures of political gratifications after watching mainstream television news, having first been exposed to content from *The Daily Show* (see Polk, et al., 2009 for a similar discussion of the moderating role of internal political efficacy). In other words, watching *The Daily Show* may interact with one's feelings of political competence and effectiveness, or notions of internal efficacy, and generalized trust and faith in the media to adequately provide the political news of the day.

Most recently, Hoffman and Thompson (2009) show that exposure to late-night political comedy has a positive and significant effect on the civic participation of young

viewers, with political efficacy acting as a mediating variable between the two constructs. Similarly, Cao and Brewer (2008) acknowledge the mediating role of political efficacy in an investigation that connects exposure to late-night comedy and other forms of media with public participation in politics. In a related vein, Baym (2005) offers a critical perspective on the content of *The Daily Show*, suggesting that Jon Stewart is trying to reawaken political trust with his brand of *journalism* -- providing a deliberative forum through which citizens can critically evaluate the media. In sum, recent research suggests that exposure to late night political comedy can have a positive and significant effect on individual notions of political efficacy. Essentially, late-night comedy simplifies politics by poking fun at politicians and the institutions of government, ultimately making the political sphere more accessible to the average citizen. Of course, current research tends to treat late-night comedy as one monolithic form, failing to recognize the unique properties that distinguish each form or type (*i.e.*, network late-night comedy, cable satires, parody programs, online political humor, etc.).

A considerable body of research connects the decline in political trust with the public's corresponding lack of faith in the mass media (Moy & Pfau, 2000). Often viewed as the *fourth democratic estate*, the media is charged with providing an objective view of politics, acting as the watchdog that protects the public from the abuses of political power (Cook, 2005; Donohue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1995). Moreover, the media is supposed to provide credible and accurate news information that is free from bias so that citizens can stay adequately informed on pressing matters of public policy (Graber, 1997; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). Recent research on perceptions of media bias and the

hostile media effect suggests that even if the mainstream media is not actually guilty of presenting slanted or biased coverage, the perception of bias is very real with both partisans and politically neutral individuals crying foul (Morris, 2007). Meanwhile, work on selective exposure points to a more fragmented news audience with individuals selecting news outlets based on the organization's proximity to their own political orientation (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2007). In fact, recent research has suggested that even the most politically aware individuals use heuristic cues to assess the credibility and ideological orientation of a news source (Baum & Gussin, 2008). On the whole, perceptions of media bias and a lack of source credibility are most often linked with attitudes toward twenty-four hour cable news networks like *Fox News* or *CNN* or public radio programming like *NPR* (Coe, et al., 2008; Morris, 2007) . To date, network news broadcasts have received considerably less public scrutiny, yet public distrust in the media still prevails (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007).

Exposure to mainstream news content has also been shown to have an influence on individual levels of political efficacy (Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998). As discussed earlier, the focus on strategic rather than thematically framed political news content has been shown to promote cynical attitudes toward the mass media and politics (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993). More recent research has suggested a differential relationship between media use and resulting feelings of political cynicism or disaffection – in other words that cynical attitudes are dependent on the type of news media being consumed and the political sophistication of the viewer (De Vreese, 2005; De Vreese & Semetko, 2002; Moy & Scheufele, 2000;

Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). With the explosion of new forms of political entertainment media has come a renewed interest in studying the effects of cynical attitudes on voting behavior and public participation in politics (Moy, Xenos, et al., 2005; Prior, 2005). In particular, recent work has focused on how political cynicism shapes the political outlook and behavior of young voters, those who are both new to the electorate and more frequent consumers of political entertainment including late-night political comedy (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Pinkleton & Austin, 2004). At present, there is a relative lack of consensus as to the precise relationship that exists between exposure to news media content, cynical attitudes, and youth participation in politics (Elenbass & de Vreese, 2008).

Exploring Theoretical Considerations: Research Question and Hypotheses

Using the preceding discussion as a theoretical framework, the analyses presented below begin by exploring two key research questions: (1) how do post-broadcast media forms influence levels of political trust among young voters, and (2): how do post-broadcast media forms influence the internal political efficacy of young voters? Given the extant literature exploring the connections between cable late-night political comedy, cable television news, network television news, and political trust, a first set of hypotheses is put forth. A first set of research questions are also outlined below in an effort to examine the connections between exposure to network late-night comedy, exposure to online political humor (*e.g., The Onion, Funny or Die*, or *Jib Jab*), learning

from political parody programs like *Saturday Night Live*, and political trust given the lack of prior research outlining these unique relationships.

> *H1:* Exposure to late-night political comedy on cable television will be negatively related to political trust.
>
> *H2*: Exposure to cable television news will be negatively related to political trust.
>
> *H3*: Exposure to network television news will be negatively related to political

trust.

> *RQ1:* How does exposure to late-night political comedy on network television influence political trust?
>
> *RQ2*: How does exposure to online political humor influence political trust?
>
> *RQ3:* How does learning from political parody programming influence political trust?

Given theoretical connections between political trust and political efficacy, a second analysis follows in an attempt to explicate the relationships that exist between exposure to diverse forms of media content and personal feelings of political competence and effectiveness. As a result, a second set of hypotheses and research questions are considered:

> *H4:* Exposure to late-night political comedy on cable television will be positively related to internal political efficacy.
>
> *H5*: Exposure to cable television news will be negatively related to internal political efficacy.

H6: Exposure to network television news will be negatively related to internal political efficacy.

RQ4: How does exposure to late-night comedy on network television influence internal political efficacy?

RQ5: How does exposure to online political humor influence internal political efficacy?

RQ6: How does learning from political parody programming influence internal political efficacy?

Data and Methods

Participants and Design

To test the hypotheses and examine the research questions delineated above, an interactive experiment was conducted during the spring of 2009 at two large public U.S. universities using the MediaLab software platform. In the Midwest, a total of 313 undergraduates participated in a six condition experiment between April 8 -21, 2009. In the South, 186 undergraduates participated in a four-condition experiment between April 20 – May 7, 2009. Students were recruited from classes in the communications departments on both campuses and also from political science and marketing classes in the Midwest, and were eligible to receive a small amount of course extra credit in exchange for their participation in the study. The uniform MediaLab platform insured that all subjects received the same experimental environment and used the same technology throughout the study on each campus. More importantly, using MediaLab

allowed for the successful replication of four experimental conditions at a second university campus.

Procedures and Stimuli

At each university, sessions began with a standard consent form that described the study as an investigation of "Perceptions of Online Video Content." Students in the Midwest were then randomly assigned to one of six conditions by the software program, while students in the South were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Each condition began with the same pre-test questionnaire that included measures of media exposure, political interest, media learning, and general political knowledge. The four conditions replicated across both universities each featured a different video clip focusing on the final days of the McCain-Palin 2008 presidential campaign. The first condition (n = 96) received a clip of McCain mocking his campaign on *Saturday Night Live*, the second condition (n = 103) received a clip of Stephen Colbert making fun of the McCain campaign on the October 29, 2008 broadcast of *The Colbert Report*, the third condition (n =115) received a straight-news video clip with John Harwood of the *New York Times* discussing the outlook for the final days of the McCain-Palin campaign, and the fourth condition (n = 88) received a video clip compilation of five attack ads targeted at the McCain-Palin campaign during the final weeks of the election cycle. Edited only for length, each of the four video clips was approximately two and a half minutes long.

In the Midwest, two additional conditions were included to enable a test of the effects of exposure to political parody on relevant political attitudes, which is discussed at

length in a related study. Subjects in this first additional condition (n = 49) watched a five and a half minute video clip of Tina Fey's parody of the Palin-Couric television interview that aired on *Saturday Night Live* on September 27, 2008. Subjects in the second additional condition (n = 48) watched a five and a half minute video clip from Sarah Palin's actual September 2008 television interview with CBS' Katie Couric. Both clips focused on similar issues and topics and were only edited to achieve comparable length.

Following the initial video clips, participants in all six conditions were then asked a first set of post-test questions measuring stimulus clip retention, opinions toward controversial political issues (*e.g.,* gay marriage, global warming, and stem cell research), and feelings toward six prominent national politicians. Next, participants were exposed to a six-minute video clip from a recent segment on PBS' *News Hour with Jim Lehrer* on the growing number of homeless school children in a mid-sized midwestern city. This clip was used as a contrast to the initial stimulus material and was part of an examination of political learning that is the focus of another study. After this second video clip, participants concluded the study by answering a final set of post-test questions measuring news clip recall, confidence in the media, political trust, internal political efficacy, and demographics. The relevant measures used in the analyses are outlined below.

Key Measures

Political Interest. Interest in following matters related to politics and government (M = 1.81, SD = 1.09) was measured on a four-point scale (1 = "hardly at all," 2 = "only now and then 3= "some of the time," 4 = "most of the time). Those who indicated that

they were "never" interested in matters related to politics and government were recoded as "0" in the dataset.

Partisanship. Two measures of partisanship were used in the analyses: party identification and political ideology. Subjects were asked to select their party identification based on the following scale: (1 = "Democrat," 2 = "Republican," 3 = "Independent," and 4 = "Something else/none of these"). This measure was then re-coded for use in the analyses that follow with Democrats coded as low and Republicans coded as high (-1 = "Democrat," 0 = "Independent/something else," 1 = "Republican). The final sample was 48% Democrat, 35% Republican, and 17 % independent or other. Interestingly, the midwestern campus was 63% Democrat, 21% Republican and 11% Independent while the campus in the South was 22% Democrat, 59% Republican, and 19% Independent.[2] Political ideology ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.67$) was based on a single-item measure of self-reported political ideology, responses ranged from (1 = "Strong liberal," to 7 = "Strong conservative"). Students in the Midwest were slightly less conservative ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.54$) than students in the South ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.34$).

Media Use. Subjects were asked to assess the frequency (0 = "Never" to 7= "Seven days a week,") with which they followed news about politics and public affairs in the past week across a wide range of media outlets. Four different measures of media exposure were used in the analyses that follow including: exposure to: (1) **cable late-**

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[2] This three-point party identification measure was used to capture the diversity of responses present among members of the subject pool as opposed to dummy variables coded for Republican and Democratic identification that would have only presented coefficients for 35% and then 48% of the sample respectively.

night comedy programs, such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart,* or *The Colbert Report* with Stephen Colbert," (M = 1.20, SD = 1.58), (2) "**news from a cable station** such as *CNN, Fox News,* or *MSNBC,*" (M = 1.83, SD = 1.93), (3) "**national network news** program, such as *ABC World News with Charles Gibson, NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams,* or the *CBS Evening News with Katie Couric,*" (M = 1.14, SD = 1.47), and (4) "**network late night comedy** programs," (*e.g.,* Letterman, Leno, O'Brien, Fallon, or Kimmel), (M = 1.03, SD = 1.44). Two additional media use measures were used in the analysis, measuring the frequency (1 = "never;" 4 = "regularly") with which subjects visit "political humor web sites like *The Onion, Funny or Die,* or *JibJab"*(M = 1.64, SD = 0.85) and "learn something about presidential campaigns or candidates from comedy shows like *Saturday Night Live"* (M = 2.24, SD = .88).

Confidence in the Media. Two items assessing confidence in the mass media were included in the analyses that follow. The first item, *media trust,* (M = 2.34, SD = .57) measured how frequently subjects feel that they "can trust the media to report the news fairly" on a four-point scale (1 = "almost never," 4 = "just about always"). The second item, *media performance,* (M = 2.35, SD = .75) reflects a general evaluation of the media's ability to cover politics using a four-point scale (1 = "poor," 4 = "very good").

Political Trust. A standard NES measure of political trust (M = 2.42, SD = .58) was used to assess confidence or faith in government. Subjects were asked to indicate how often they think they can "trust the government to do what is right" using a four-point scale (1 = "never," 4 = "just about always,").

Internal Political Efficacy. A measure of internal political efficacy ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.21$) was constructed from responses to five items assessing an individual's confidence in their ability to comprehend and participate effectively in matters of politics. Measured on the same seven-point scale ($1 =$ "strongly disagree," $7 =$ "strongly agree,"), the five items included: (1) "I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics," (2) "I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of important political issues facing our country," (3) "I feel 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, and (5) "Sometimes, politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on." The fifth item was recoded to match the direction of the other four items. The combined scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .83.

Demographics. Finally, a few demographic items were included in the study to account for any variation that might exist in the subject pool, both within and across university campuses. Key measures used in the analyses presented in this paper include gender (the combined dataset was 32% male; 68% female) and age (combined $M = 21.18$, $SD = 1.53$).

Analytical Plan

The analyses employ hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to examine the significant relationships between key variable constructs and the two dependent variables of interest: (1) government or political trust, and (2) internal political efficacy. Hierarchical regression enters blocks of variables based on their assumed causal

order, measuring the relative contribution of each variable block above and beyond

previously entered blocks. In both analyses, a location dummy variable was entered

initially, followed by demographic measures. Political predispositions followed in the

next block, distinguishing between political interest, partisan identification, and

ideological orientation. The media use measures then followed in the next two blocks.

The first media use block included exposure measures by content type, distinguishing

between network late night comedy, network evening news, cable late night comedy, and

cable television news. The second media block included a measure of the frequency with

which subjects visit political humor web sites and a measure of self-reported political

learning from comedy shows like *Saturday Night Live*. In the first analysis, the final

block included measures of media confidence, or more specifically, measures of media

trust and perceived media performance. In the second analysis, the final block included

the measures of media trust and performance along with a measure of political trust, *i.e.,*

the dependent variable in the first analysis.

Results

Analysis 1: Political Trust

Table 3.1 displays the upon-entry and final standardized regression coefficients

for the first hierarchical OLS regression examining political trust[3]. The upon-entry beta

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[3] Analysis 1 favors a hierarchical OLS regression procedure over an ordered logit or
probit model. While political trust is not a true continuous dependent variable, few
measures used by political communications researchers truly satisfy all of the
assumptions of OLS regression (Hayes, 2005). The results presented in Table 3.1 offer a

coefficients control for all variables entered into the model in the previous blocks as well as the other variables that were entered within the same block. The contribution of each subsequent block to explaining the variance in the dependent variable, political trust, is listed as the incremental R^2. The sum of the incremental R-squares is listed as the Final R^2, or the percent of the variance in the dependent variable, political trust, that is explained by the full model.

[Insert Table 3.1 about here.]

As Table 3.1 shows, location and demographic variables offer little explanatory value in the analysis, explaining only 0.7% of the variance in the dependent variable, political trust. This is not surprising given the relative homogeneity of the student sample featured in the analysis. It is interesting to note, however, that while not significant, female subjects had more positive estimations of political trust than their male counterparts in the study, while older subjects were more likely to possess negative levels of political trust. The third block of the regression model, incorporating political predispositions (*e.g.*, partisan identification, political ideology, and political interest) again did not offer significant explanatory value in the analysis, but it is interesting to note that the political interest variable emerged as marginally significant in the final model ($\beta = -.09, p < .10$), suggesting that those who have higher levels of political interest are also more likely to display a lack of faith or trust in politics and government.

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meaningful analysis of the relationships between exposure to various forms of media and political trust. In this case, political trust is measured on a four point scale with most subjects clustering around the middle points of the scale indicating they trust the government "often" or "sometimes" and fewer subjects selecting responses at the end of the scale indicating they trust the government "all the time," or "rarely."

While the fourth and fifth blocks of the regression model incorporating measures of media use do not explain a significant amount of the variance in the dependent variable, political trust, (combined incremental R^2 = 2.0%), the network comedy variable does emerge as a significant and positive predictor of political trust (β = .10, p < .05), providing interesting insight relevant to *RQ1*. At the same time, exposure to online political humor and reported learning from comedy programs like *Saturday Night Live* do not emerge as significant predictors in the regression model and fail to offer any insight with respect to *RQ2* or *RQ3*. In addition, since none of the other media exposure variables (*e.g.,* network evening news, cable late night comedy, and cable television news) emerge as significant in the model, this first regression analysis fails to offer any support for the first set of hypotheses posed by this research (*H1, H2, H3*).

The sixth and final regression block, integrating measures of media trust and performance into the model, explained an additional 12.0% of the variance in the dependent variable, political trust. This block represented the largest incremental increase in R^2, and displayed significant, positive relationships between evaluations of media trust (β = .30, p < .001), media performance (β = .09, p < .10), and political trust. Overall, the final regression model explains 15.8% of the variance in the dependent variable, political trust.

Ultimately, these findings suggest that while there is some connection between media use, confidence in the media, and political trust, the data does not fully speak to the precise relationships that exist between exposure to particular media types and evaluations of political trust. Rather, the results suggest that there may be a larger

phenomenon at work here, and that it may be more fruitful for researchers to examine the broader impact of exposure to post-broadcast media on political trust, irrespective of content type. In sum, it may be premature to try and isolate the specific relationships that exist between consumption of particular forms of media content and trust in politics and the government.

Analysis 2: Internal Political Efficacy

Table 3.2 displays the upon-entry and final standardized regression coefficients for the second hierarchical regression analysis examining internal political efficacy. As in Analysis 1, the upon-entry beta coefficients control for all variables entered into the model in the previous blocks as well as the other variables that were entered within the same block. The contribution of each subsequent block to explaining the variance in the dependent variable, internal political efficacy, is listed as the incremental R^2. The sum of the incremental R-squares is listed as the Final R^2, or the percent of the variance in the dependent variable, internal political efficacy, that is explained by the full model.

[Insert Table 3.2 about here].

As Table 3.2 shows, location does not significantly impact the regression analysis, rather the results are consistent across campuses. It is interesting to note that the second regression block, incorporating demographic variables, explains a significant portion of the variance in the dependent variable, political efficacy, with females emerging as significantly less likely ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .05$) to express more positive judgments of internal political efficacy (incremental $R^2 = 4.0\%$). The third block of the regression analysis,

inserting political predispositions (*e.g.,* partisan identification, political ideology, and political interest) into the model explains an additional 5.7% of the variance in the dependent variable, internal political efficacy, highlighting the significant negative relationship between political interest (β = -.27, p < .001) and internal political efficacy. In other words those who are more interested in politics are less likely to feel politically efficacious.

The fourth and fifth variable blocks integrate measures of media use into the analysis. In direct contrast to *Analysis 1*, the fourth regression block incorporating measures of media use by content type represents the largest incremental increase in R^2 at 11.2%. The final regression model offers evidence of a positive significant relationship between exposure to cable comedy programming (β = .09 p < .05) and internal political efficacy. This offers direct support of *H4* and suggests that viewing late-night political comedy on cable can have a positive effect on assessments of one's own political competence and understanding. In addition, the final regression model displays a positive and significant relationship between exposure to cable news (β = .28, p < .001) and levels of internal political efficacy. This finding stands in direct contrast to *H5* that predicted a significant, but negative relationship between exposure to cable television news and internal political efficacy. As a result, the analysis fails to offer support for *H5*, and given the lack of a significant relationship between exposure to network television news and political efficacy, *H6* is also not supported by the research.

While the regression does not provide evidence of a relationship between exposure to network late night comedy and political efficacy, thus failing to provide

insight with respect to *RQ4*, the model does offer some interesting findings that are directly relevant to *RQ5* and *RQ6*. Specifically, the results point to a significant, positive relationship between exposure to online political humor ($\beta = .12, p < .01$) and internal political efficacy, and a significant but negative relationship between learning from comedy programs like *Saturday Night Live* ($\beta = -.09, p < .05$) and political efficacy. This fifth variable block incorporating political humor variables into the model accounts for an additional 1.9% of the variance in the dependent variable; taken together the media blocks account for an additional 13.1% of the variance in the dependent variable, internal political efficacy.

The sixth and final regression block incorporates measures of media trust, perceived media performance, and political trust into the model. Together, these variables only explain an additional 1% of the variance in the dependent variable, internal political efficacy. While it is likely that there is some mediating relationships that exist between confidence in the media, trust in government, and political efficacy, the results of *Analysis 2* suggest that baseline media use has a far greater influence upon feelings of political efficacy among this college-age sample. Moreover, the media use variables likely overshadow the full weight of the relationships that may exist between media trust, media performance, political trust, and political efficacy given their placement in the model and the presumed causal order of the other variable blocks. All told, the final regression model explains 24.0% of the variance in the dependent variable, internal political efficacy.

In the aggregate, the findings point to the reality that the full political comedy media effects equation may still be on the horizon. While *Analysis 2* provides direct evidence of significant relationships between exposure to media by content type (*e.g.,* cable comedy, cable news, online political humor, variety programs) and political efficacy, *Analysis 1* only offers evidence of a direct, positive relationship between exposure to network comedy programming and political trust. Taken together, both models fail to fully specify the precise relationships that exist between exposure to particular media types and political output variables of interest like trust or efficacy. In general, the results seem to point toward a more macro-level connection between media exposure and political trust given the significant relationships between media trust, perceived media performance, and political trust. At the same time, *Analysis 2* offers evidence of a more specific, content-dependent relationship between media exposure and judgments of internal political efficacy. Given this, it may be more fruitful for communication research to first focus on understanding the precise connections between exposure to various forms of political comedy and internal political efficacy, before turning toward an investigation of other political variables of interest like government trust or political participation.

Discussion

This study set out to refine the standard political comedy media effects equation by presenting a more complete picture of the relationships that exist between exposure to various forms of post-broadcast media and key political behavioral variables of interest

like political trust and internal political efficacy among members of the political comedy target audience. First, various political humor texts were considered in context. Rather than simply focusing on exposure to network or cable late night comedy programming, the analysis considered how exposure to online political humor and learning from politically-oriented variety programs like *Saturday Night Live* factored into the equation. Second, the impact of exposure to political comedy programming was considered in conjunction with exposure to other forms of post-broadcast media---namely cable television and network evening news---recognizing that those who tune into late night political comedy are also paying close attention to news content from more traditional sources. Finally, rather than consider one political variable of interest, the study considered the impact of post-broadcast media exposure on levels of political trust or faith in government and judgments of internal political efficacy, recognizing the connections that exist between the two key constructs.

While the results specify some of the concrete relationships that exist between exposure to various forms of post-broadcast media and key political outcomes, it is clear that this is a pilot or preliminary investigation and that there is still work to be done to further clarify the political comedy media effects equation, particularly as it applies to the larger population. At the same time, the findings suggest that exposure to political comedy may be more closely connected with personal politics or an individual's sense of internal political efficacy rather than more macro-level evaluations of political trust or faith and confidence in the government. Research that connects exposure to political comedy with more personal political evaluations may be a more fruitful endeavor at this

juncture. In time, identifying the links between exposure to political comedy and more macro-level political variables like political trust may become more straightforward. This dynamic is not fully surprising given that the very nature of political comedy is to simplify complicated matters of politics, making both political success and political failures more understandable for the everyday viewer and average political actor. As discussed earlier, Baym's (2005) reading of *The Daily Show* suggests that Jon Stewart's brand of journalism provides a deliberative forum through which citizens can critically evaluate the media and politicians, eventually reviving trust in politics and faith and confidence in government. Perhaps the first step to restoring political trust begins with bolstering an individual's faith in their ability to comprehend and effectively participate in the complicated spectacle that is American politics.

At present, the findings presented from this study suggest that exposure to network political comedy has a positive impact on levels of political trust among young viewers, but that measures of media trust and perceived media performance have a greater influence on political trust or faith and confidence in government. At the same time, the results offer evidence of positive relationships between exposure to late night political comedy on cable, cable television news, and political efficacy. All told, it seems that despite claims to the contrary, the net effect of exposure to mainstream news and comedy content is positive, with clear implications for levels of political trust and assessments of internal political efficacy. Essentially, the more young people expose themselves to news content ---whether serious or funny in orientation--- the more encouraging the picture for American democracy.

At the same time, the impact of less conventional forms of media (*e.g.,* online political humor, politically-oriented variety programming) is less clear. While the findings fail to illuminate any significant relationships between exposure to these specific forms of political humor and levels of political trust, the second analysis offers evidence of a positive relationship between exposure to online political humor and internal political efficacy, and yet a negative relationship between political learning from programs like *Saturday Night Live* and judgments of political efficacy or competency. It is entirely possible that mere exposure may have a positive effect on political behavior, but more involved, cognitive processing or learning may have a negative effect on political behavior given a greater likelihood for a viewer to engage in argument scrutiny, thus more critically evaluating the messages put forth by programs like *Saturday Night Live* (Nabi, et al., 2007; Polk, et al., 2009; Young, 2008). Unfortunately, the study did not incorporate measures of simple exposure to programs like *Saturday Night Live*, focusing instead on post-exposure political learning. Part of the negative relationship between learning from *Saturday Night Live* and feelings of political efficacy may be attributed to the particularly critical parodies of politicians like Tina Fey's version of Sarah Palin, or the self-directed humor presented during guest appearances by both Senator John McCain and then Alaska Governor Sarah Palin during the final weeks of the 2008 presidential campaign. It is also possible that other intervening or antecedent variables may be left out of the model explaining internal political efficacy. More specifically, it is possible that other factors like the political nature of one's household, prior history of viewing

programs like *Saturday Night Live*, and frequency and diversity of political discussions may moderate the influence of exposure to less conventional media forms.

In contrast, online political humor from web sites like *The Onion*, *Funny or Die*, or *JibJab* tends to be more satirical in nature, almost bordering on the ridiculous. Thus paying attention to this type of political humor should result in less argument scrutiny, with viewers simply discounting any serious messages, focusing instead on getting and enjoying the joke. It may also be important to consider how viewers come to view and consume online political humor. Attempts at argument scrutiny and the practice of message discounting may depend in part upon whether a viewer stumbles across new content on sites like *JibJab* themselves or whether a trusted family member or friend shares relevant links. While this study takes a first step in teasing out the influence of various forms of political comedy on key political variables of interest like trust and efficacy, it is clear that future work needs to continue this line of research, considering both the nature of the comedy content (*i.e.,* friendly vs. critical) and the medium of delivery.

Before concluding, it is important to point out some limitations of the current study. First, as discussed at the outset, the data used in the analyses are from a series of experimental studies conducted with undergraduates at two large public universities in the spring of 2009. Essentially treated as a convenience sample survey dataset, the analyses only really reflect the experience of college age students. While it is clear that this younger group represents the primary audience for political comedy, particularly television and online political comedy, future research should extend to the general

population and consider the broader impact of exposure to political comedy programming on political trust and internal political efficacy. The findings presented here are preliminary and at best -- the results reflective of what is essentially a pilot study. In fact, the relationships present in the analyses might actually be attenuated by the reliance on a younger convenience sample. Young people's comfort with and high level of exposure to political comedy may actually promote weaker connections between exposure to comedy and political trust and internal political efficacy. It is possible that the political comedy effects equation might be different for older audience members with the relationships between exposure and key behavioral variables of interest like trust and internal political efficacy more pronounced and significant. Clearly, this type of more representative investigation is a fruitful avenue for future research. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the study was designed to primarily measure baseline media exposure to a variety of post-broadcast media options. Given space constraints, it was not possible to collect both exposure and learning measures for all of the types of media content included in the study. Future research should pair measures of exposure with more involved media measures like attention or learning to paint a more complete picture of the full political comedy media effects equation.

Despite these limitations, the findings presented point to the importance of considering the impact of a variety of forms of political comedy on key political variables of interest like political trust and political efficacy. At the same time, the results suggest it is also important to consider the impact of political comedy programming alongside exposure to more traditional forms of news content. As network late night political

comedy continues to expand with new programs like *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* and *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* gaining popularity, it is clear that the supply of political comedy will only continue to multiply. Moreover, as newer forms of political comedy emerge, increasingly trespassing into the mainstream media space, research of this kind will become all the more important, thus encouraging political communications researchers to present a more inclusive and accurate representation of the post-broadcast media environment.

It is important to remember that while elections cycles come and go, political comedy remains. While the volume of material may increase during the height of the primary and then general election campaign season, network late-night comedians, cable hosts Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, and variety shows like *Saturday Night Live* continue to roast politicians well into their tenure in office. In fact, many have suggested that program hosts like Jon Stewart or David Letterman do a good job of keeping politicians in check by holding them accountable and by making sure they deliver on their campaign promises. As such, it is important for research to continue to consider the impact of political comedy programming on indicators of democratic citizenship in both the on and off-season. As political comedy content becomes easier to share, with the opportunity cost of forwarding a funny clip or link over email or through social networking sites like Facebook now close to nil, the niche audience for this type of material will only continue to grow exponentially. In due time, political communication researchers may be able to better specify the relationships that exist between exposure to political comedy and measures of political trust and efficacy, eventually understanding

what exposure to political comedy content means for civic engagement and youth

political participation.

CHAPTER 4: STAR POWER? RECEPTIVITY, EFFICACY AND THE STATE OF CELEBRITY ISSUE POLITICS

Introduction

During the 2008 primary and general election cycle, celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Barbara Streisand, and Chuck Norris told the American public who they were voting for and why, ultimately suggesting that voters embrace the same candidates and take their carefully constructed endorsements to heart. Leonardo DiCaprio led a cast of celebrities who first told young viewers not to vote and then finally to encourage five of their friends to register and get out and vote. Jack Black, Neil Patrick Harris, and a celebrity chorus encouraged Californians to vote against Proposition 8, or the California Marriage Protection Act, with a just over three minute viral video entitled "Prop 8: The Musical." Finally, will.i.am of the Black Eyed Peas, Scarlett Johansson, John Legend, and others showed their support for the Obama campaign with their "Yes We Can" or "WeCan08" viral music video. While celebrity involvement in the 2008 election served as a visible point of reference for many Americans, celebrity involvement in electoral politics is certainly not a new or emerging trend.

Previous research has carefully documented the rise of "celebrity politics," by cataloging the political involvement of citizens who have close ties to the American political system and the Hollywood entertainment industry (Brownstein, 1990; West & Orman, 2003, p. 2). The *Hollywood-Washington connection*, according to West & Orman (2003) is driven by the involvement of five types of celebrity politicos: (1) political

newsworthies, (2) legacies, (3) famed nonpoliticos turned elected officials, (4) famed

nonpoliticos turned lobbyists and spokespersons, and (5) event celebrities. Political

newsworthies are individuals like James Carville or Jesse Jackson, Sr., who are

"politicians and handlers skilled at public relations and self-promotion," legacies are the

next generation of politicians from prominent political families (e.g., the Kennedys,

Bushes, and Gores of the country), and famed nonpoliticos turned elected officials are

those who were well known outside the world of politics before they assumed the

responsibilities of elected office – two recent examples being Al Franken and Arnold

Schwarzenegger (Canon, 1990; West & Orman, 2003, p. 2). Famed nonpoliticos are

celebrity issue advocates who speak out and lobby on particular issues of interest. Some

more recent examples include Matt Damon, George Clooney, Natalie Portman, Angelina

Jolie, and Brad Pitt (Traub, 2008). These individuals call attention to the issues that they

feel are most pressing by persuading politicians and average Americans to see the

importance of their cause. Finally, event celebrities are individuals "who gain notoriety

overnight due to some tragedy, event, or life situation," (West & Orman, 2003, p. 2).

While the nature and scope of celebrity political involvement differs depending upon

politico type, it has become increasingly clear that the worlds of entertainment and

politics are interconnected and that celebrity involvement in politics has become a central

part of our working democracy (Marshall, 1997). While some scholars have suggested

that celebrity involvement in politics leads to the "pop culturization" of politics and the

destruction of our political culture, others point toward the benefits of celebrity

involvement in politics and the positive impact that celebrity political involvement can

have on youth civic and political engagement (Austin, et al., 2008; Gitlin, 2003; Payne, et al., 2007; Postman, 2006).

To date, little research has directly engaged in an empirical study of the influence of celebrity involvement in politics on key indicators of democratic citizenship. Moreover, even less research has considered the impact of celebrity issue advocacy efforts on public opinion and political engagement, particularly among young people. In an attempt to extend burgeoning empirical work on the effects of celebrity politics, this study begins by first assessing the current state of celebrity politics in the post-2008 election environment. Next, this research focuses on understanding which national and international political issues are most befitting of celebrity political involvement, or put differently, which issues citizens think are appropriate for celebrities to address. An empirical investigation into the factors that best explain receptivity toward celebrity involvement in politics follows, relying on data from an experimental study conducted in the fall of 2009 among undergraduate students enrolled at a large public midwestern university. Finally, this study considers the impact of exposure to celebrity issue advocacy on internal political efficacy. On the whole, this research begins to ask the question: *What is the net impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics?*

Current State of Celebrity Politics

According to their mission statement, the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF), "harnesses the collective power of the entertainment industry and channels its unique assets to raise awareness and funds for critical health, educational and social

issues in order to make a positive impact in our community and throughout the nation"

("Caring: Impact report," 2007). The organization works to connect celebrity

spokespeople with established non-profit organizations looking for "celebrity

ambassadors" and to help develop and support celebrity charity initiatives like the

Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project or the Black Eyed Peas Peapod Foundation.

While the EIF has a rich history dating back to 1942, it is just one of many celebrity

driven non-profit organizations focused on issue advocacy efforts. Some of the most

visible celebrity issue advocates spearhead their own independent organizations like

Bono's "One" campaign which focuses on fighting poverty and the spread of disease in

Africa or "Not On Our Watch," a collaborative effort by Don Cheadle, George Clooney,

Matt Damon, Brad Pitt, David Pressman, and Jerry Weintraub that focuses on bringing

visibility to international crises.

At the most basic level, these celebrity advocates use their social capital and

celebrity status to encourage politicians, donors, world organizations, and ordinary

citizens to support their cause (Bourdieu, 2001; Traub, 2008; Zeleny, 2009).

Organizations like the United Nations have worked to cultivate the celebrity connection,

creating honorary posts for celebrities like George Clooney, Charlize Theron, and

Michael Douglas (UN Messengers of Peace) and Angelina Jolie, Drew Barrymore, and

Nicole Kidman (UN Goodwill Ambassadors). Even journalists have embraced the

activism of celebrity issue advocates on key issues of interest, making the most of the

added attention that celebrities can bring toward unfolding global concerns (Kristof,

2009).

Most of these celebrity advocates would suggest that their activism is motivated first and foremost by their passion and concern for their chosen issue or issues of interest. At the same time, political activism also has tangible benefits for the celebrity, who according to Boorstin (1961) is "a person who is well-known for their well-knowness" (p. 58). As Brownstein (1990) notes:

> ...for the majority of socially conscious celebrities – one of the greatest attractions of political activism is the opportunity to shift the blinding and dehumanizing glare of celebrity that follows them onto a worthy cause that might otherwise remain obscure. Susan Sarandon spoke for many when she told one interviewer: 'If my privacy is going to be invaded and I'm going to be treated as a commodity, I might as well take advantage of it' (Brownstein, 1990, p. 11).

Similarly, celebrity endorsements of political candidates, like Oprah Winfrey's highly publicized endorsement of Barack Obama in May of 2007 during the height of the Democratic presidential primary, shift attention away from the celebrity endorser and toward the candidate in question. Instead of using their social capital to bring added visibility to a political issue, celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Barbara Streisand, and Chuck Norris used their celebrity status to draw attention toward the candidate they most wanted to see elected president in the months before the 2008 election. These celebrity endorsements can bring a windfall of good fortune to candidates competing in tight electoral contests, and unlike cash contributions that are subject to a federal limit, these premium endorsements are the type of in-kind contributions that lack a price tag or dollar amount. As Oprah Winfrey aptly noted on the May 1, 2007 broadcast of *Larry King Live*:

'Well the truth of the matter is, whether I contribute or not contribute, you are

limited to how much you contribute, so my money isn't going to make any

difference to him,' Ms. Winfrey said. 'I think that my value to him, my support of

him, is probably worth more than any check,' (Zeleny, 2007).

The Impact of Celebrity Politics on Celebrity

While political advocacy efforts can shift the spotlight toward contemporary issue

debates or political contests and away from focusing on the personal life or box office

receipts of a given celebrity, media attention toward celebrity political advocacy can also

help to enhance the careers and public image of politically engaged Hollywood

celebrities. The added media attention that comes along with championing a political or

social cause can help keep a celebrity in the spotlight and can serve as a supplement to

reports that primarily focus on entertainment-related earnings. For example, Angelina

Jolie's number one ranking on the Forbes Celebrity 100 list reflects her film industry

earnings and her added media visibility given developments in her personal life and her

work on the refugee issue. The other celebrities rounding out the top ten are also top

earners and active politicos and include individuals like Oprah Winfrey, Madonna, Bruce

Springsteen, Brad Pitt, and Steven Spielberg (M. Miller, Pomerantz, & Rose, 2009).

Moreover, as Meyer and Gamson (1995) argue, celebrities very carefully select

which issues to champion, bringing visibility to only the most politically uncontroversial

issues. More specifically, celebrities primarily align with liberal perspectives on issue

debates, focus on charity or fundraising efforts rather than on real political reform, and

promote more generalized group orientations towards controversial issues -- *i.e.,* advancing a discussion of collective civil rights over the discussion of the claims of a marginalized or stigmatized minority group (Meyer & Gamson, 1995). Celebrities also only choose to tackle issues on which they can seem like credible sources, or issues with which they have acquired "standing." For example, celebrities are seen as trusted sources when it comes to the varied humanitarian crises around the globe because they have used their personal resources to travel extensively in these troubled regions. Besides, it is hard to object to the argument that those in third world countries should have access to clean water, shelter, and health care – these are issues that are free from controversy. Similarly, raising money for cancer research, the arts, or environmental protection are benign pursuits.

The Impact of Celebrity Politics on Politics

Without question, celebrity involvement in political advocacy efforts brings added visibility and attention to often overlooked issues. While this added visibility is a boon for celebrities interested in remaining well known, celebrity involvement can be a bit of a double-edged sword for social movement organizers and lay political advocates. Sometimes added media and public attention toward a key political issue can dilute the message of a movement, making it harder for organizers to control the tenor and scope of the debate (Gitlin, 2003; Meyer, 1990). Similarly, celebrity involvement can actually have a demobilizing effect, limiting the success of grassroots recruitment efforts aimed at encouraging more generalized citizen participation. In addition, celebrity involvement

can limit the visibility of more marginalized yet potentially more engaged minority groups and stymie concentrated efforts at political reform and citizen education (Meyer & Gamson, 1995). Finally, while celebrity involvement can draw attention to certain issues that are often overlooked by the mainstream media, at the same time, celebrity involvement can draw attention away from other related, perhaps equally important issues.

In a related vein, recent research has suggested that while celebrity involvement can be an important tool for advocacy groups, it may not be powerful enough to truly influence the agenda-setting function of the mass media. While celebrity political involvement may garner some media attention, recent analyses by Thrall et al. (2008) suggest that stories about celebrity political involvement represent just one small piece of the media's attention to these larger political issues or causes. The authors argue that celebrity advocacy efforts may be more effective in persuading niche audiences to pay attention to a given concern, achieving success given a *narrowcasting* rather than broadcasting media model. Recent work has also shown that targeted celebrity political issue advocacy efforts can strengthen public agreement with accepted political arguments and in some cases can also make unpopular political statements seem more acceptable -- especially among members of an attentive or captive audience. (Jackson & Darrow, 2005). Moreover, the more credible and well-liked the celebrity source, the greater the likelihood that individuals will agree with the political sentiments expressed by the celebrity, especially if their own personal viewpoints are already similar in orientation (Jackson, 2007). In other words, celebrities, especially popular figures, can reinforce

preexisting political opinions and more generalized attitudes and orientations toward

society (Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003).

Recent work has also considered the impact of celebrity candidate endorsements

on public opinion and voting behavior. In a study examining the impact of Oprah

Winfrey's May 2007 endorsement of Barack Obama during the Democratic presidential

primary, Pease and Brewer (2008) found that exposure to news about the endorsement

did not have a positive impact on favorability ratings or candidate likeability, but that

exposure did have a positive impact on perceptions of Obama's electability and the

likelihood of voting for Obama. Recognizing that measuring the net effect of celebrity

political endorsements is a tricky endeavor, Garthwaite and Moore (2009) developed a

series of models estimating the impact of Oprah's May 2007 endorsement of Barack

Obama. After carefully testing for alternate explanations, the authors concluded that

Oprah's endorsement of Obama translated directly into additional financial campaign

contributions and approximately one million additional votes for the candidate during the

course of the primary campaign (Garthwaite & Moore, 2009).

As a contrast, Wood and Herbst (2007) suggest that first-time voters rank

celebrity events and advertising as items that are *least* likely to influence their vote

choice, relying instead on advice from friends and family. At the same time, the results of

their study showed that young Democrats were more receptive to celebrity political

endorsements than young Republicans. They conclude by suggesting that celebrity

endorsements may have a modest impact on vote choice among young people, but that a

social desirability bias toward no effects may be clouding the reporting of present

political reality. In fact, celebrity endorsements may have a considerable impact on the politics of first-time and younger voters who often rely on heuristic judgments when making political decisions (Pease & Brewer, 2008; Popkin, 1994).

Finally, given the rise in celebrity get-out-the vote (GOTV) appeals, recent work has examined whether these messages can have a positive impact on the political engagement of young people and increase turnout rates among first-time voters. For example, Austin et al. (2008) found that students who were more receptive to celebrity spokespeople and GOTV efforts exhibited lower levels of complacency and higher levels of political self-efficacy. On the other hand, Wood and Herbst (2007) suggest that these celebrity GOTV appeals did little to help increase voting likelihood. Nevertheless, organizations like Rock the Vote, Declare Yourself, and Citizen Change still rely almost exclusively on celebrity PSAs in their political marketing campaigns – hoping that even modest effects will increase voting and political participation rates among young people (Austin, et al., 2008). Moreover, data from the 2004 election shows that youth turnout was higher in states with more concentrated voter outreach and political advertising efforts (Austin, et al., 2008).

Public Opinion Toward Celebrity Politics: Does Celebrity Involvement Make a Difference?

Poll data from the fall of 2007 shows that while Americans had a favorable impression of Oprah Winfrey (68% favorable in a September 2007 FOX News poll; 66% favorable in an October 2007 Gallup/USA Today poll) and felt that her endorsement of

Barack Obama would help his candidacy (60% in September and December 2007 Pew

News Interest Index Polls), a majority indicated that Oprah's endorsement would have

little effect on their vote choice (69% "wouldn't make a difference" in a September 2007

Pew poll; 80% "no difference" in a December 2007 CBS/New York Times Poll).[4] Similar

trends emerge when other celebrities like Angelina Jolie and Jon Stewart are considered –

a large majority of Americans have favorable opinions of these public figures yet fail to

indicate any significant or noteworthy impact on their own personal political beliefs and

opinions. Despite these public opinion trends, celebrity involvement in issue advocacy

efforts and competitive election campaigns continues to grow.

While data from public opinion polls suggest that Americans feel celebrities have

little impact on vote choice and only a modest impact on controversial issue opinions, it

is likely that a social desirability bias against celebrity political influence may be

prejudicing poll results (Pease & Brewer, 2008). As discussed earlier, recent

experimental work has suggested that celebrity political involvement can enhance

perceptions of candidate electability, have a positive impact on voting likelihood and

even actual voter turnout and financial campaign contributions (Garthwaite & Moore,

2009; Pease & Brewer, 2008). Moreover, previous research has shown that celebrities

can reinforce agreement on key political issues and make controversial political

arguments seem more tolerable (Jackson & Darrow, 2005). Finally, research has

suggested that celebrity political involvement may have a greater impact on younger or

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[4] The survey results reported here were obtained from searches of the iPOLL Databank
and other resources provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research,
University of Connecticut.

first-time voters who are both more in tune with celebrity culture and more likely to rely on heuristic cues when making political decisions (Austin, et al., 2008; Jackson, 2007; Pease & Brewer, 2008; Wood & Herbst, 2007). All told, it seems reasonable to expect to find that celebrity involvement in issue politics has a significant net impact on the politics of young voters.

Exploring Theoretical Considerations: Research Question and Hypotheses

As a first step in assessing the current state of celebrity politics in the post-2008 election environment, we begin by considering which political issues young voters deem to be most appropriate for celebrities to address. Given the discussion presented earlier, it seems plausible to suggest that the less important the political issue, the more acceptable and appropriate young voters will feel it is for celebrities to get involved in order to advocate for their own political positions. In contrast, young voters should be less supportive of celebrity political advocacy efforts aimed at addressing more complicated or politically important issues. A first hypothesis is put forth as a more formal test of this assumption:

H1: Perceived issue importance will be inversely related to the appropriateness of celebrity issue involvement.

Next, the study explores which factors best explain receptivity toward celebrity issue politics in an effort to understand whether some individuals are more likely to be open toward celebrity involvement in issue advocacy efforts than others. Given the proposed connections between exposure to celebrity politics and political heuristics

acknowledged above (Pease & Brewer, 2008), it seems reasonable to suggest that exposure to celebrity issue advocacy messages should have a net positive effect on receptivity toward celebrity issue politics, at least in the short term. While previous research has suggested that there may be a social desirability bias against indicating that celebrity political statements have an effect on public opinion or political behavior (Pease & Brewer, 2008; Wood & Herbst, 2007), exposure to targeted celebrity messaging should at least have a positive effect on receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics in general, especially among younger individuals who are more in tune with entertainment culture. A second hypothesis is put forth in order to more formally test the relationship between exposure to celebrity issue advocacy messages and receptivity toward celebrity politics:

> *H2*: Exposure to celebrity issue advocacy will be positively related to receptivity
> toward celebrity politics.

Since celebrities are individuals who are "well-known for their well-knowness," it makes sense that issue advocacy messages which highlight both the celebrity's visual public image and their preferred political message would have a greater impact on audience members than text-centered messages, particularly among younger viewers (Boorstin, 1961, p. 58). For example, previous research has shown that visual or video images can promote a more emotional connection with a recognizable source and encourage greater interest, learning, and more advanced processing of relevant messages especially when compared with a text appeal (Graber, 2001; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; Veenstra, Sayre, Shah, & McLeod, 2008). Moreover, visual associations with a

recognizable, well-known celebrity source should only amplify the relevance and perceived importance of the message (Messaris, 1997; Messaris & Abraham, 2001). It therefore makes sense to suggest that those who are exposed to a video-based celebrity issue advocacy appeal should be more receptive and sympathetic toward celebrity political involvement than those exposed to a text-based message. In light of this discussion, a third and final hypothesis is put forth:

> *H3*: The effect of exposure to celebrity video appeals on receptivity toward celebrity politics should be larger than the effect for exposure to celebrity text appeals.

> As a final point of inquiry, the analyses that follow consider the net influence of celebrity issue politics, with a focus toward examining the relationships that might exist between political predispositions, political inputs (*e.g.,* political knowledge and sophistication), media use, exposure to celebrity issue appeals, and more general evaluations of internal political efficacy. While previous work has offered evidence of a connection between receptivity toward celebrity politics and higher levels of political self-efficacy (Austin, et al., 2008), research in this particular area of study remains exploratory at best. Given the lack of conclusive extant research on the political impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics, a research question is considered:

> *RQ1*: Does exposure to celebrity issue politics influence evaluations of internal political efficacy?

Methods

Participants and Design

To test the hypotheses and examine the research question outlined above, a four-condition (plus control) online survey experiment was conducted during the fall of 2009 at a large public university in the Midwest. Students were recruited from classes in the communications departments and were eligible to receive a small amount of extra course credit in exchange for their participation in the study. A total of 483 undergraduates participated in the online experiment between October 4 – 16, 2009.

Procedures and Stimuli

Online sessions began with a standard consent form that described the study as an investigation of "Evaluations of Issue Content." Randomly assigned to one of four conditions or the control group, each subject began by completing the same pre-test questionnaire that included measures of political interest, issue importance, media exposure by content type, political knowledge, celebrity favorability rankings, and political sophistication. Next, subjects randomly received one of four experimental stimuli or simply went on to answer the post-test questionnaire if they were part of the control group.

The four experimental stimuli provided information on recent developments in the global refugee crisis, contrasting the testimony and involvement of celebrity advocate and United Nations Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie with the testimony and involvement of an issue expert, Antonio Guterres, the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees and former Prime Minister of Portugal. Subjects in the first condition ($n = 96$) received a video clip of Angelina Jolie speaking at the World Refugee Day summit in June of 2009. Subjects in the second condition ($n = 100$) received a video clip of Antonio Guterres offering his message for World Refugee Day 2009. Both video clips were approximately three minutes in length and were taken from YouTube. Subjects in the third condition ($n = 78$) were given a June 18, 2009 CNN.com text article to read that highlighted Angelina Jolie's involvement with World Refugee Day 2009 and featured quotes from the actress and UN Goodwill Ambassador on the importance of the refugee issue. Subjects in the fourth condition ($n = 95$) were given a June 16, 2009 CNN.com text article that discussed the release of the U.N. Global Trends report on refugee issues and featured quotes on the state of the refugee crisis from U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres. Both articles were around 400 words long. Finally, the fifth cell ($n = 114$) served as the control group and did not receive any stimulus material.

Following the stimulus material, subjects completed a post-test questionnaire that included measures of clip recall, receptivity toward celebrity issue involvement, situational involvement with the global refugee crisis, the appropriateness of celebrity involvement on a series of political issues, complacency, apathy, political efficacy, and key demographic considerations. The relevant measures used in the analyses are outlined below.

Key Measures

Political Interest. Interest in following matters related to politics and government

(M = 2.30, SD = .95) was measured on a five-point scale (1 = "never," 2 = "hardly at all,"

3 = "only now and then 4= "some of the time," 5 = "most of the time). Those who

indicated that they were "never" interested in matters related to politics and government

were recoded as "0" in the dataset.

Political predispositions. Two measures of partisanship were used in the

analyses: party identification and political ideology. Subjects were asked to select their

party identification based on the following scale: (1 = "Democrat," 2 = "Republican," 3 =

"Independent," and 4 = "Something else/none of these"). This measure was then re-coded

for use in the analyses that follow (1= "Democrat," 0 = "all others"). The final sample

was 57% Democrat, 23% Republican, and 20 % Independent or other. Political ideology

(M = 3.22, SD = 1.57) was based on a single-item measure of self-reported political

ideology (1 = "strong liberal," to 7 = "strong conservative").

Media use. Subjects were asked to assess the frequency (0 = "never" to 7= "seven

days a week,") with which they followed news about politics and public affairs in the past

week across a wide range of media outlets. Four different measures of media exposure

were used in the analyses that follow including: (1) the Internet (M = 3.28, SD = 2.36),

(2) "news from a cable station" such as *CNN, Fox News,* or *MSNBC,*" (M = 1.20, SD =

1.45), (3) "national network news program, such as *ABC World News with Charles*

Gibson, NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams, or the *CBS Evening News with Katie*

Couric," (*M* = .69, *SD* = 1.15), and (4) "national newspaper like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, or *USA Today*," (*M* = 1.16, *SD* = 1.67).

Political Knowledge and Sophistication. Two separate sets of items were used to measure the political knowledge and the political sophistication of the subjects participating in the study. A general political knowledge index (*M* =4.29, *SD* = .98) was constructed to reflect the number of correct responses to five standard political knowledge survey items: (1) "Do you happen to know what job or political position is currently held by Joe Biden?" (2) "Do you happen to know which political party currently holds a majority of seats in the US House of Representatives?" (3) "Which political party is more conservative, the Democrats or the Republicans," (4) "If Congress passes a bill, and it is vetoed by the President, how much of a majority is required for the US senate and House to override that veto?" and (5) "Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not, the President, Congress, or the Supreme Court?" An index of political sophistication (*M* = 2.89, *SD* = 1.67) or more specialized political knowledge was constructed to reflect the number of correct responses to five more complex survey items including: (1) "What is the name of the President of Russia?" (2) "What is the name of the governor of your home state?" (3) "What are the names of the senators from your home state?" (4) "Recently a new justice was added to the Supreme Court. Please name this person," and (5) "President Obama recently gave a speech to a Joint Session of Congress. What was the topic of this speech?" (Correct answer was health care).

Issue Importance. Subjects were asked to indicate the political importance (1 =

"not at all important," to 5 = "extremely important,") of six different political issues

including: (1) the economy (M = 4.23, SD = .73), (2) the environment (M = 3.78, SD =

.93), (3) the situation in Iraq (M = 3.62, SD = .88) (4) the global refugee crisis (M = 2.94,

SD = .95), (5) health care (M = 3.95, SD = .91), and (6) gay marriage (M = 3.21, SD =

1.13). A more detailed analysis of these items is featured in Table 4.1.

Appropriateness of Issue Involvement. Subjects were given a set of six political

issues and asked to asses how appropriate "it is for celebrities to get involved and

campaign for others to support their view on the issue" using a 7-point scale (1 = "not at

all appropriate," to 7 = "extremely appropriate,"). The six issues featured in the study

include: (1) the economy (M = 3.68, SD = 1.77), (2) the situation in Iraq (M = 4.21, SD =

1.61), (3) the global refugee crisis (M = 4.96, SD = 1.43), (4) health care (M = 4.22, SD =

1.70), (5) gay marriage (M = 4.80, SD = 1.67), and (6) stem cell research (M = 4.15, SD =

1.60). Table 4.1 provides additional information on these items, contrasting the

appropriateness of issue involvement with the political importance of key issues.

Receptivity. A measure of receptivity toward celebrity issue involvement (M =

4.54, SD = 1.39) reflected the mean response to four related statements about celebrity

involvement in issue politics (measured on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly

disagree," and 7 = "strongly agree,"). The original statements were: (1) "Celebrities

should not get involved with political issues," (2) "I admire the celebrities who have been

promoting political issues," (3) "I like that celebrities are drawing attention to political

issues," and (4) "There have been too many celebrities talking about political issues."

Before building an index, items 1 and 4 were recoded so that all statements were oriented in a positive direction. The final receptivity toward celebrity issue involvement index had a Cronbach's alpha of .86. The items were adapted from recent work on celebrity endorsements and youth political engagement (Austin, et al., 2008).

Efficacy. A measure of internal political efficacy ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.22$) was constructed from responses to five items assessing an individual's confidence in their ability to comprehend and participate effectively in matters of politics. Measured on the same seven-point scale (1 = "strongly disagree," 7 = "strongly agree,"), the five items included: (1) "I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics," (2) "I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of important political issues facing our country," (3) "I feel 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, and (5) "Sometimes, politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on." The fifth item was recoded to match the direction of the other four items. The combined scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .83.

Demographics. Finally, a few demographic items were included in the study to account for any variation that might exist in the subject pool. Key measures used in the analyses include gender (the combined dataset was 27% male; 73% female) and age (combined $M = 20.42$, $SD = 2.22$).

Results

Table 4.1 presents the results from the initial analysis focusing on the relationship between perceived issue importance and the appropriateness of celebrity political involvement at the issue level. The table displays both the perceived mean importance of the issue and the perceived mean appropriateness of celebrity involvement in issue advocacy efforts. In addition, the data in Table 4.1 also present rankings for the seven issues featured in the study -- both in terms of perceived issue importance and appropriateness of celebrity involvement. As Table 4.1 shows, the economy---the issue deemed to be most important by subjects---is also ranked as the issue that is least appropriate for celebrities to address. In contrast, the global refugee crisis was perceived as the least important political issue yet was the issue that subjects felt was most appropriate for celebrities to adopt. Similarly, while the health care issue was listed as the second most important political issue, it ranked third in the list of appropriate issues for celebrities to tackle. Finally, the issue of gay marriage was listed as the fifth issue in order of importance, but the second issue most appropriate for celebrities to address. The results presented in Table 4.1 offer support for *H1* and confirm that perceived issue importance is inversely related to the appropriateness of celebrity issue involvement. Thus, these initial findings suggest that less important political issues are also those that are seen as most befitting of celebrity political involvement and advocacy efforts.

[Insert Table 4.1 about here.]

Next, the analyses consider receptivity toward celebrity issue politics. Table 4.2 displays the results of a one-way ANOVA analysis examining differences in receptivity

toward celebrity political involvement across condition. The significant results $F(4,478)$ = 4.76, $p < .01$, $\eta = .04$, suggest that receptivity toward celebrity involvement does vary significantly across treatment condition. As a follow-up, Table 4.3 displays mean levels of receptivity toward celebrity political involvement by condition. The results suggest that those exposed to celebrity issue appeals (both video and text) were the most receptive toward celebrity political involvement in general ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.43$ for video; $M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.40$ for text) especially when compared to those exposed to expert appeals ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.44$ for expert video; $M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.20$ for expert text) or those in the control group who were not exposed to any issue advocacy materials ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.33$). It is worth noting that those exposed to celebrity video appeals had higher mean levels of receptivity toward celebrity politics than those exposed to celebrity text-based appeals. Taken together, these initial results offer preliminary support for *H2* by suggesting that exposure to celebrity issue advocacy efforts is positively related to receptivity toward celebrity politics. Moreover, the data presented in Table 4.3 offer preliminary support for *H3*, suggesting that the net effect of exposure to celebrity video appeals is larger than the net effect of exposure to text-based celebrity appeals.

[Insert Table 4.2 and Table 4.3 about here.]

Table 4.4 displays the upon-entry and final standardized regression coefficients for a hierarchical OLS regression analysis examining variation in receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics. Hierarchical regression enters blocks of variables based on their assumed causal order, measuring the relative contribution of each variable block above and beyond previously entered blocks. The upon-entry beta coefficients

control for all variables entered into the model in the previous blocks as well as the other variables that were entered within the same block. The contribution of each subsequent block to explaining the variance in the dependent variable, receptivity toward celebrity political involvement, is listed as the incremental R^2. The sum of the incremental R-squares is listed as the Final R^2, or the percent of the variance in the dependent variable, receptivity toward celebrity political involvement, that is explained by the full model.

[Insert Table 4.4 about here.]

As Table 4.4 shows, demographic variables explained only 1.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, receptivity toward celebrity political involvement. Initially and in the final model, female subjects were significantly more likely to be receptive toward celebrity political involvement ($\beta = .10$, $p < .01$). The second block of the regression model, incorporating political predispositions (e.g., partisan identification, political ideology, and political interest) into the analysis, explained an additional 11.7% of the variance in receptivity toward celebrity political involvement, highlighting a significant positive relationship between being a Democrat and receptivity toward celebrity political involvement ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$) and a significant negative relationship between conservative political ideology and receptivity toward celebrity political involvement ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .01$).

The third block of the regression model, integrating political input measures (e.g., political knowledge, political sophistication, and perceived political importance of the global refugee crisis) offered evidence of a significant positive relationship between perceived importance of the global refugee crisis and receptivity toward celebrity

political involvement ($\beta = .10, p < .05$), yet only explained an additional 1.4% of the variance in the dependent variable. Similarly, the fourth block of the regression model, incorporating baseline measures of media use (*e.g.,* weekly use of newspapers, network TV news, cable TV news, and the Internet to learn about politics and public affairs) only explained an additional 0.8% of the variance in the dependent variable, receptivity toward celebrity political involvement.

Interestingly, the fifth block of the regression model that added dummy variables for each of the treatment conditions into the analysis explained an additional 2.6% of the variance in receptivity toward celebrity political involvement. The results suggest that even after controlling for other variables like partisan identification, political ideology, and perceived issue importance, those exposed to celebrity video ($\beta = .19, p < .001$) and celebrity text ($\beta = .13, p < .01$) appeals were significantly more likely to be receptive toward celebrity involvement in issue politics, offering additional support for *H2*. Moreover, the coefficient for those exposed to video based celebrity appeals was larger and more significant than the regression coefficient for those exposed to text-based celebrity appeals. This finding offers further support for *H3* and suggests that celebrity video appeals may indeed have more impact on viewers than text-based appeals. It is worth noting here that the fifth block of the regression model also pointed toward a significant positive relationship between exposure to expert video appeals ($\beta = .11, p < .05$) and receptivity toward celebrity political involvement, but that this relationship was smaller and less significant than the relationship between exposure to either celebrity video or text appeals and receptivity toward celebrity political involvement. In fact, a

review of the unstandardized beta coefficients showed a larger effect for exposure to the celebrity video condition (b = .66, SE = .18), followed by smaller, more modest unstandardized coefficients for the celebrity text (b = .50, SE = .19) and then expert video (b = .38, SE = .18) appeal conditions. The analysis did not offer any evidence of a significant relationship between exposure to expert text appeals and receptivity toward celebrity political involvement. The final regression model explained 18.4% of the variance in the dependent variable, receptivity toward celebrity political involvement.

As a final point of investigation, the study looked at whether there was a connection between exposure to celebrity issue politics and evaluations of internal political efficacy. While this last analysis is exploratory in nature given the lack of confirmatory prior research on the political effects of exposure to celebrity politics, the model considers the relationships that might exist between political predispositions, political inputs, media use, exposure to celebrity issue appeals, and more general evaluations of internal political efficacy. Table 4.5 presents the results of this preliminary examination, displaying the upon-entry and final standardized regression coefficients for the hierarchical OLS regression analysis examining variation in internal political efficacy.

[Insert Table 4.5 about here.]

As Table 4.5 shows, demographic variables explain 10.6% of the variance in the dependent variable, internal political efficacy, with females emerging as significantly less likely to express more positive judgments of internal political efficacy (β = -.20, p < .001). The second block of the regression model, integrating political predispositions

(*e.g.,* partisan identification, political ideology, and political interest) into the analysis explains an additional 31.3% of the variance in the dependent variable, internal political efficacy. This block represents the largest incremental increase in R^2 and offers evidence of a strong, positive, and significant relationship between political interest and internal political efficacy ($\beta = .37, p < .001$).

The third block of the regression model, incorporating political inputs (*e.g.,* political knowledge, political sophistication, and perceived political importance of the global refugee crisis) into the analysis explains an additional 5.8% of the variance in internal political efficacy, highlighting significant positive relationships between political knowledge ($\beta = .13, p < .001$), political sophistication ($\beta = .18, p < .001$), and internal political efficacy. The fourth block of the regression model adds measures of media use to the analysis and offers evidence of a significant positive relationship between newspaper use ($\beta = .07, p < .05$) and evaluations of internal political efficacy. Together the media use measures in this fourth regression block explain an additional 1.3% of the variance in evaluations of internal political efficacy.

Finally, the fifth and final block of the regression model inserting dummy variables for each of the treatment conditions into the analysis only explained an additional 0.2% of the variance in internal political efficacy, failing to offer evidence of any significant relationships between exposure to particular treatment conditions and evaluations of internal political efficacy. The lack of emergent significant relationships in this final block of the regression model may be because other variables like political interest, political knowledge, and political sophistication emerged as significant

predictors of internal political efficacy earlier in the model. Moreover, the impact of exposure to celebrity issue politics on internal political efficacy may be better measured over time rather than after brief exposure to relevant experimental stimuli. Unfortunately the results presented here only offer limited insight with respect to *RQ1* and suggest that the true picture of the relationship between exposure to celebrity issue politics and judgments of internal political efficacy may still be on the horizon.

On the whole, the results suggest that young viewers (especially young women and Democrats) are receptive toward celebrity involvement in issue politics, particularly when involvement surrounds issues that are perceived to be of lesser political importance like the global refugee crisis or "soft" social issues like the same sex-marriage debate. At the same time, hard political issues like the economy are seen as less appropriate for celebrities to address. Celebrity video appeals emerged as a more impactful tool than text-based celebrity appeals. Finally, both video and text-based celebrity appeals had more influence than either video or text-based expert appeals.

Discussion

This study set out to assess the current state of celebrity politics in the post 2008 election environment by first reviewing the nature of contemporary celebrity political involvement, carefully noting the range of celebrity politico types and distinguishing between issue advocacy efforts, celebrity endorsements, and GOTV campaigns. The first analysis considered which national and international political issues are most appropriate for celebrities to address finding that the political importance of an issue is inversely

related to the perceived appropriateness of celebrity involvement. In other words, the less important the political issue, the more acceptable it is for celebrities to get involved in issue advocacy efforts. Conversely, the more important the political issue, the less appropriate it is for celebrities to be visibly involved. The second analysis showed that exposure to both celebrity video and text-based appeals have a positive impact on receptivity toward celebrity political involvement, with video appeals appearing to have stronger net effects. Lastly, the third analysis failed to show a connection between exposure to celebrity issue appeals and evaluations of internal political efficacy, suggesting that research on the political influence of exposure to celebrity politics remains exploratory in nature at best.

While the results begin to shed some light on the net impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics, it is important to point out some limitations of the current study. First, the experimental stimuli present contrasting testimony (celebrity vs. expert; video vs. text) on just one political issue – the global refugee crisis. While the global refugee crisis has found a very visible and vocal celebrity advocate in Angelina Jolie, it is just one of many issues that has garnered considerable celebrity attention. In truth, the global refugee crisis is an issue that is free from controversy, and as such is a valence or easy issue rather than a position issue or hard issue (Ansolabehere & Snyder, 2000; Carmines & Stimson, 1980; Stokes, 1963). As a valence issue, it is easy for viewers to simply agree with the sentiments presented by Jolie and Guterres. Had subjects been presented with a position issue, or a hard issue that requires a clear political viewpoint or opinion preference, it is likely that exposure to the issue advocacy appeals would have

had a more robust and perhaps differential impact on general receptivity toward celebrity

political involvement and evaluations of internal political efficacy.

In reality, however, since most celebrities choose to get involved with valence

issues rather than position issues, the global refugee crisis offered an ideal case study.

Moreover, the issue debate offered clear, sanctioned testimony from both a celebrity

advocate (Angelina Jolie) and appointed issue expert (Antonio Guterres). All of the

stimuli materials featured in the study were drawn from the same short (less than a week

long) time-period in the June of 2009, matched in terms of content, length, and overall

tone, and were taken from the same respective sources (UNHCR YouTube video content

prepared for World Refugee Day 2009; CNN.com text articles written to coincide with

the World Refugee Day 2009 summit). Nevertheless, since the global refugee crisis was

seen as a less important political issue by the subjects participating in the study, future

research may benefit from considering the differential impact of celebrity vs. expert

testimony on both less important and more pressing political issues, *i.e.,* issues that

require individuals to adopt particular positions or take-up key issue stances.

While the experimental design offers an empirically and ecologically valid test of

the differences between exposure to celebrity video, expert video, celebrity text, and

expert text appeals, the results represent a post-exposure snapshot at best, highlighting the

short-term effects of exposure. Future research should consider long-term effects by

measuring the net impact of prolonged or repeated exposure to celebrity issue advocacy

efforts over time. Finally, it is important to point out that the subjects participating in the

experiment were undergraduates enrolled in communications courses at a major public

university in the midwestern United States. As such, the results presented are not generalizable to the larger population and are only reflective of a narrow sample of college-aged individuals who may have been more receptive toward celebrity political involvement from the outset. In effect, it is possible that the relationships that emerge in the regression analyses are attenuated by this generational preference toward celebrity involvement in political culture and that older individuals ---who are less receptive toward celebrity involvement in politics in general--- may be more easily persuaded by exposure to celebrity issue advocacy appeals. At the same time, these younger individuals are the primary target audience for many of the celebrity GOTV appeals, marking them as a group that is deserving of careful study.

Despite these limitations, the findings presented point toward the importance of considering the impact of exposure to celebrity politics on political engagement, public opinion, and political interest---particularly among young people who are both more in tune with celebrity culture and more likely to make political decisions based on heuristic cues (Austin, et al., 2008; Jackson, 2007; Pease & Brewer, 2008; Wood & Herbst, 2007). While coverage of celebrity issue advocacy efforts represents just one part of the body of media coverage on relevant national and international political issues, this celebrity coverage may be of particular interest to a younger and presumably more impressionistic audience (Thrall, et al., 2008). Moreover, as we come ever closer to the realization that, "in contemporary culture there is a convergence in the source of power between the political leader and other forms of celebrity," it is likely that we will see increasing coverage of celebrity driven issue advocacy efforts (Marshall, 1997, p. 17). As the

distinctions between celebrity and politician become more difficult to tease out and as politicians are increasingly packaged as celebrities, the terms politician and celebrity may become more interchangeable in mainstream media coverage (Gamson, 1994).

The findings from the present study suggests that exposure to celebrity issue appeals – whether in video or text format – can have a positive impact on receptivity toward celebrity politics in general. As younger audiences increasingly turn toward the Internet as their primary source of international and national news and as sites like YouTube and others connect a young viewing public with a narrowing stream of content, it is highly likely that rates of exposure to celebrity issue appeals will grow over time. While it is too soon to tell whether prolonged exposure will have a marked impact on public opinion and the political engagement of young people, these changing media dynamics may point toward a fruitful avenue for future research. In addition, continued research on the net impact of celebrity politics may help lay issue advocates understand the best ways to cultivate celebrity involvement, drawing added publicity to a pressing issue in a way that does not stifle grassroots support or dilute the political and educational messages of the movement.

Celebrity issue appeals are driven by the celebrity themselves and receptivity may vary depending upon the familiarity with and perceived favorability of the celebrity advocate. In addition, receptivity may depend on the perceived credibility of the celebrity source and whether viewers believe the celebrity has acquired enough "standing" or expertise on the given issue. While the findings presented in this study suggest that the less important the political issue, the more appropriate it is for celebrities to get involved,

it is important to recognize that favorability toward a celebrity advocate and perceptions of source credibility may complicate the connections made between issue importance and appropriateness of involvement. It is possible that the net impact of celebrity issue appeals may vary depending upon the favorability of the celebrity advocate or the perceived credibility of the famous spokesperson. Future research should not only explore the impact of celebrity appeals given a range of national and international political issues but also consider the varying degrees of familiarity with and favorability toward a range of visible celebrity issue advocates. It may be that the more favorable and credible the celebrity advocate, the more appropriate it may be for him/her to tackle a more important and presumably more complicated political issue.

Returning to the discussion of the post-2008 political environment, it is has become increasingly clear that the world of politics and the world of celebrity no longer exist as separate spheres. Instead, we see celebrities like Brad Pitt, George Clooney, and Denzel Washington among the list of White House visitors who gained an audience with members of the executive branch during the first six months of the Obama administration (Zeleny, 2009). Moreover, magazine publishers continue their attempts to secure Michelle Obama as their cover girl and paparazzi photos of Barack Obama continue to circulate on the Internet. In fact, a March 2009 Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Poll of 900 registered voters found that 49% see Barack Obama as more like a world leader while 35% said they see him as more like a celebrity (12% indicated both; 4% selected don't

know as a response option).[5] While the net impact of celebrity involvement in politics on public opinion and political engagement may be hard to measure at present, it is likely that as the lines between celebrity and politician continue to blur, researchers may get closer toward more fully understanding the true net effect of celebrity involvement in politics.

Future Research on Celebrity Politics

A natural extension of this preliminary work on the impact of celebrity politics in the post-2008 election environment is a more in-depth focus on assessing the net impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics. As discussed earlier, the number of celebrity issue advocates and organizations that promote celebrity political activity has grown---almost exponentially---over the course of the past decade. While organizations like the Entertainment Industry Foundation work to connect celebrities with relevant causes and movements, some celebrities have even started their own issue advocacy organizations to promote a more personalized and targeted approach toward addressing key concerns. Importantly, celebrity political involvement can mean added visibility and financial resources for social movement campaigns. At the same time, celebrity involvement can also encourage grassroots activism and citizen interest in key issue debates. It is important to note that while celebrity political involvement can help to reshape the

[5] FOX News, Opinion Dynamics. Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Poll # 2009: March 3-4 2009 (USODFOX.030509.R39) [computer file]. 1st Roper Center for Public Opinion Research version. New York, NY: FOX News [producer], 2009. Storrs, CT: The Roper Center, University of Connecticut [distributor], 2010.

media's agenda with respect to key issue debates, celebrity political involvement can also enhance the public image of the celebrity advocate, often drawing media attention away from more personal and often times embarrassing news items. In sum, celebrity involvement in issue politics has clear implications for the future of social and political movements and may offer important insights into the way we treat celebrity status in our evolving American political and consumer culture.

While celebrity GOTV appeals reappear every four years, celebrity involvement in issue politics is more constant and ultimately less subject to the ins and outs of competitive election cycles. As such, an investigation of the impact of exposure to celebrity issue appeals should present a more generalizable snapshot of the American political experience and offer a more representative picture of the ways in which celebrity involvement in issue politics is impacting public opinion and political engagement. Chapter 5 begins this more in-depth study of the net impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics. Using Angelina Jolie's involvement with the global refugee crisis issue debate as a case study, the next piece of the project considers how exposure to celebrity vs. expert issue advocacy appeals impacts situational involvement, complacency, and issue apathy.

CHAPTER 5: POP POLITICS? THE INFLUENCE OF CELEBRITY ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS ON SITUATIONAL INVOLVEMENT, COMPLANCENCY, AND ISSUE APATHY

Introduction

The connections between the Hollywood entertainment industry and the Washington DC political machine abound (Brownstein, 1990). Whether advocating for a pet cause or issue, endorsing political candidates, or encouraging young citizens to vote, celebrity involvement in civic and political life has become a central part of our contemporary political landscape. Moreover, it has become increasingly more difficult to separate the politician from the celebrity as more celebrities campaign for and are elected to public office and as prominent politicians are packaged and handled like celebrities (Marshall, 1997; West & Orman, 2003). For some, the connections between celebrity and political life are a real cause for concern and signal the destruction of our already fragile democracy and ailing political culture (Gitlin, 2003; Postman, 2006; Weiskel, 2005). For others, celebrity involvement in national political life is seen as beneficial with clear positive implications for youth civic and political engagement (Austin, et al., 2008; Payne, et al., 2007).

Recent research has started to explore the impact of celebrity involvement in politics on issue opinions, candidate perceptions, and voting behavior (Austin, et al., 2008; Jackson, 2007; Jackson & Darrow, 2005; Pease & Brewer, 2008; Wood & Herbst, 2007). With respect to issue opinions, recent work suggests that political statements made by popular celebrities can reinforce preexisting political opinions and also make

controversial statements seem more agreeable (Jackson, 2007; Jackson & Darrow, 2005). Pease and Brewer (2008) recently found that exposure to media coverage of Oprah's endorsement of Barack Obama during the Democratic presidential primary in May of 2007 had a positive impact on perceptions of Obama's electability and the likelihood of voting for Obama in the upcoming primaries. Moreover, Garthwaite and Moore (2009) have suggested that Oprah's endorsement of Obama had a significant impact on the rate of financial contributions made to the campaign during the primary season and was ultimately responsible for delivering an additional one million votes for Obama. Finally, recent work by Austin et al., (2008) offered evidence of a connection between receptivity toward celebrity get-out-the-vote (GOTV) appeals and lower levels of political complacency and higher levels of political self-efficacy -- ultimately suggesting that these celebrity appeals may positively influence youth political engagement.

It is interesting to note that to date, the majority of the current research on the impacts of celebrity involvement in political life focuses on understanding effects at a more macro level and is primarily concerned with generalizable political issue opinions and participation and voting in high-profile national elections. Given the current volume and visibility of celebrity issue advocacy efforts, this study seeks to extend promising work on the impact of celebrity involvement in political life by looking at the impact of celebrity issue advocacy efforts on public opinion and political engagement at the issue level. Using data from an online experiment conducted among undergraduate students enrolled at a large public midwestern university in the fall of 2009, this study begins to

answer the question: *How does celebrity involvement in issue politics influence public opinion and political engagement at the issue level?*

Celebrities & Issue Politics

Celebrity issue advocates draw attention toward issues that they feel are of great national and international importance and that they feel are too often overlooked by the media, politicians, donors, NGOs, and even ordinary citizens. Some contemporary examples include Matt Damon's H_2O Africa Foundation that focuses on addressing Africa's water crisis at the community level, Natalie Portman's advocacy on behalf of microloans, Bono's "One" campaign targeted at fighting poverty and the spread of disease in Africa, and Angelina Jolie's leadership on the global refugee crisis (Traub, 2008). Similarly, celebrities take an active role in political campaigns either by endorsing candidates (*e.g.,* Oprah's endorsement of Barack Obama, Barbara Streisand's support for Hillary Clinton, and Chuck Norris' commercials on behalf of the Mike Huckabee campaign during the 2008 election cycle) or by advocating for particular positions on measures of direct democracy (*e.g.,* celebrity support for the "Vote No on Prop 8" campaign in California during the 2008 election). Moreover, over the years, celebrities have been an integral part of social movement campaigns and organized protest efforts (Meyer, 2007; Meyer & Gamson, 1995).

While most celebrities would suggest that their activism is motivated solely by their concern and passion for the issues, it is important to recognize that celebrities also personally benefit from being actively involved and engaged with the national and

international community – both in terms of positive publicity and by drawing the focus away from more personal or potentially damaging news items (Brownstein, 1990; Meyer & Gamson, 1995). At the same time, celebrity involvement on key issues means added media and political attention for concerns that are often overlooked (Kristof, 2009; Thrall, et al., 2008). At present, it is not clear whether this added celebrity attention has a lasting effect on citizens, both in terms of public opinion and political engagement at the issue level.

Focus on the Global Refugee Crisis

One of the most visible of celebrity advocates is Angelina Jolie who currently serves as a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador and is perhaps the most discernible public figure drawing attention to the global refugee crisis. Working with the UN Refugee Agency and UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, Jolie has traveled around the globe to bring attention to the plight of refugees. She has spoken out on the issue in many ways and across multiple platforms, making countless media appearances, addressing organized events like World Refugee Day 2009, and by gaining an audience with prominent national and international political figures. At the same time, Jolie holds the number one spot on the 2009 Forbes Celebrity 100 list primarily because of her box office earnings but also because of the added media attention that she receives in response to her political activism (M. Miller, et al., 2009). Celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Madonna, Bruce Springsteen, Brad Pitt, and Steven Spielberg round out the 2009 Forbes Celebrity 100 top ten -- all are top earners and active in national and

international issue advocacy efforts. While all of these very public figures are likely deeply committed to the issues they champion, it goes without saying that their "celebrity status" benefits from being actively involved and engaged.

The UNHCR/UN Refugee Agency was created in 1951 to help over 1 million refugees displaced by World War II. Today, the UNHCR reports "that the number of refugees of concern to UNHCR stood at 10.5 million refugees at the beginning of 2009" (UNHCR, 2010). For Jolie and others, the refugee crisis is one of the most pressing world concerns. For the vast majority, however, the global refugee crisis is of secondary importance and often fails to make it on the list of most pressing issues facing the country. For example, undergraduates participating in the fall 2009 experiment discussed at length below listed the global refugee crisis as the least important issue behind the economy, health care, the environment, the situation in Iraq, and gay marriage. At the same time, these undergraduates also saw the global refugee crisis as the issue most appropriate for celebrities to address over gay marriage, health care, the situation in Iraq, stem cell research, and the economy.

As discussed earlier, this study draws upon recent work highlighting the positive impact that celebrity political involvement can have on issue opinions, perceptions of candidate electability, voting likelihood and turnout, and political engagement in order to assess whether celebrity issue advocacy efforts can positively impact issue engagement and involvement (Austin, et al., 2008; Garthwaite & Moore, 2009; Jackson, 2007; Jackson & Darrow, 2005; Pease & Brewer, 2008; Wood & Herbst, 2007). Contrasting Angelina Jolie's celebrity issue appeals with the appeals of an issue expert – Antonio

Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and Former Prime Minister of Portugal – this study seeks to consider celebrity involvement in context while also measuring the differential impact of exposure to video vs. text-based issue appeals. In sum, by using Angelina Jolie's involvement with the global refugee crisis as a case study, the research considers whether receptivity toward and exposure to celebrity issue advocacy appeals has an impact on situational involvement, complacency, and issue apathy.

Receptivity Toward Celebrity Politics

Before looking at the effects of exposure to celebrity issue advocacy efforts on situational involvement, complacency, and issue apathy, it is important to first discuss receptivity toward celebrity political involvement. Recent work has suggested that younger individuals are both more in tune with celebrity culture and more likely to rely on heuristic cues when making political decisions (Pease & Brewer, 2008). Taking advantage of this dynamic, organizations like Rock the Vote, MoveOn/Vote for Change, Vote or Die, and Declare Yourself work primarily with celebrities to produce GOTV appeals targeted at younger voters who have historically had lower turnout rates on Election Day (Austin, et al., 2008; Wood & Herbst, 2007; Xenos & Kyoung, 2008). Recent work on voter turnout has suggested that these GOTV appeals have in fact achieved considerable success during the past few election cycles (Lopez, Kirby, & Sagoff, 2005; Xenos & Bennett, 2007) Moreover, non-profit organizations, particularly

organizations that focus on health, the environment, or the arts consistently rely on celebrity spokespeople to rally support for their cause (Meyer & Gamson, 1995).

The working assumption is that these personal appeals by identifiable celebrities will help spur youth political and civic engagement, whether on Election Day or throughout the course of the rest of the year. Needless to say, it is important to recognize that while young people are more likely to be in tune with celebrity culture than older voters, there are varying degrees of receptivity toward celebrity political involvement among this younger age cohort. For example, Wood and Herbst (2007) recently found that young Democrats were more receptive toward celebrity political involvement than young Republicans. Similarly, previous work has shown that young females are more receptive toward celebrity political involvement than their male counterparts (Becker, in progress). Building off recent work treating receptivity toward celebrity political involvement as a key variable in the study of political disaffection (Austin, et al., 2008), this study incorporates *receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics* as key factor influencing engagement (*e.g.,* situational involvement, complacency, and apathy) with the global refugee crisis issue debate.

Situational Involvement

Applying work on situational theory (see Roser, 1990 for a discussion), Austin et al. (2008) connect situational involvement with a discussion of identification with and receptivity toward celebrity GOTV appeals. Arguing that identification with celebrity GOTV appeals increases the perceived relevance of the cause, they also suggest that

identification has a negative effect on levels of complacency and a positive impact on situational involvement. Essentially, in this case, situational involvement is defined as "an individual's perception of the personal relevance of a set of circumstances at a particular point in time, or a level of interest in an outcome." (Austin, et al., 2008, p. 426) More specifically, Austin et al., (2008) suggest, "Individuals who perceive the cost for a wrong choice as high are considered to have greater involvement in the situation and to seek and process messages more carefully whereas those who perceive little cost will engage minimal mental effort to process information" (p. 426). Applied to a political context, situational involvement is integral in promoting information-seeking behaviors, more active patterns of media consumption, and political engagement (L. B. Becker & Dunwoody, 1982; Eveland, 2002; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). In contrast, those who do not feel "situationally involved" will make little effort to stay informed or engage with a particular concern given little interest in the fundamental issue debate or controversy (Holbert, Kwak, & Shah, 2003). Adding a popular celebrity to the mix can further promote media use, drawing attention not only to coverage of the celebrity but also the relevant national or international political issue (Brown, et al., 2003). To date work on situational involvement, celebrity politics, and political engagement has focused on a more general rather than issue-specific context. As a first step in extending the foregoing discussion of situational involvement to the study of celebrity issue politics (all the while using the global refugee crisis as a case study), an initial research question is considered:

RQ1; What factors influence situational involvement with the global refugee crisis?

Political Disaffection: Complacency and Issue Apathy

Work on political engagement considers the connections between demographic variables, media use, political participation, and political efficacy. Conceptually, political efficacy is partitioned into two separate yet related constructs: (1) self-efficacy or internal political efficacy which is measured as an individual's evaluations of their own ability to effectively understand and participate in politics, and (2) external efficacy, or confidence and faith in political leaders and the institutions of government (Craig, et al., 1990). Work on external efficacy is often referred to as the study of political cynicism or even more broadly, political disaffection (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; De Vreese, 2005). Political disaffection can then also be broken down into associated yet distinct constructs, *e.g.*, cynicism, complacency, and apathy (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001; Pinkleton & Austin, 2004; Pinkleton, et al., 1998). Building off of previous research on the connections between celebrity politics and political disaffection (Austin, et al., 2008), the current study considers the connections between celebrity politics and complacency and apathy rather than cynicism given the focus on issue politics and the reality that for the most part, celebrity issue advocates operate outside of formal political institutions.

Complacency is defined as a lack of concern for political matters. Applied to the case study of the global refugee crisis, complacency would reflect a lack of concern for the issue and contentment with one's current knowledge of and involvement with the issue debate. Complacent individuals would feel largely disconnected from the global refugee crisis issue debate and feel relatively unmotivated to learn more or participate in issue related activism. Apathy, on the other hand, is defined as a *total lack of interest* in

political matters. Applied to the case study of the global refugee crisis, apathy would reflect a total lack of interest in learning more or becoming engaged with the global refugee crisis issue debate. In sum, apathetic individuals should feel totally removed from the discussion of the global refugee crisis while complacent individuals should be satisfied with their current level of awareness and involvement.

Adding celebrity issue advocacy appeals to the mix of relevant communication options and in consideration of previous work on celebrity politics and political disaffection (Austin, et al., 2008), it makes sense that those who are more receptive toward celebrity issue politics may be less complacent toward the global refugee crisis. While these complacent individuals may be satisfied with their current level of involvement with the global refugee crisis issue debate, they should not be totally turned off to the possibility of learning more. Apathetic individuals, on the other hand, should be totally disinterested in being presented with more information related to the global refugee crisis. In sum, receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics should be negatively related to issue complacency but should have no effect on apathy toward the global refugee crisis issue debate. To more formally test these assumptions, a first hypothesis is put forth:

H1: Receptivity to celebrity politics should be negatively related to issue complacency.

Prior interest or situational involvement with the global refugee crisis may also influence political disaffection at the issue level. The more relevant the global refugee crisis seems to one's own personal and political situation, the less likely they should be to

express complacent or apathetic orientations toward the current issue debate. Two additional hypotheses are put forth in order to enable a more formal test of the relationships between situational involvement at the issue level and political disaffection:

H2: Situational involvement with the global refugee crisis should be negatively related to complacency

H3: Situational involvement with the global refugee crisis should be negatively related to issue apathy

The Effect of Celebrity Issue Advocacy Appeals

In addition and as discussed briefly above, it is worth exploring whether exposure to targeted celebrity issue advocacy messages has a net effect on situational involvement, complacency, or issue apathy. Traditionally, work on celebrity endorsements has considered both the perceived credibility and attractiveness of the celebrity source measuring concepts like likability, familiarity, perceived similarity with the source, and trustworthiness (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008; Erdogan, 1999; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; McGuire, 1985; Ohanian, 1990; Silvera & Austad, 2004). Recent work shows that the more credible the celebrity source, the more persuasive the appeal and the more positive the related attitudes toward the product in question (Biswas, Biswas, & Das, 2006). Similarly, the more attractive the celebrity source, the more they are "liked" by members of the target audience and the more positive the net impact of the endorsement or appeal on related attitudes and evaluations (Ohanian, 1990).

Of course, perceptions of celebrity attractiveness can vary across members of the target audience. For example, Desphande and Stayman (1994) found that the ethnic status or affiliation of a celebrity endorser had an effect on subjects perceived trustworthiness of the celebrity source. The gender of the celebrity endorser is also an important factor to consider. Research in this area has presented a mixed pattern of results --- early work has suggested that exposure to attractive female celebrities has a positive effect on related product attitudes for both male and female subjects, with a more pronounced effect for male audience members (see Erdogan, 1999 for a review). At the same time, research has also shown that female subjects are more prone to buy a product endorsed by a female, while males prefer products endorsed by males (Caballero, Lumpkin, & Madden, 1989). Overall, the physical attractiveness of a celebrity source produces a "halo effect," often irrespective of gender, that helps encourage subjects to find the celebrity trustworthy, credible, and in turn express favorable attitudes toward the product in question (Ohanian, 1990). In other words, the attractiveness of the celebrity endorser creates a positive glow around the product and encourages viewers to attach their vision of the celebrity to the relevant product, brand, or issue, thus transferring the identity of the celebrity to the product in an attempt to make meaning out of relevant communication appeals --- *i.e.,* meaning transfer theory (McCracken, 1989).

Current thinking suggests that attractiveness may be a more important factor determining the relative success of celebrity endorsements especially when compared to endorsements made by a credible expert (Biswas, et al., 2006). Attractiveness, or familiarity with, likeability of, and perceived similarity with a celebrity source can act as

a peripheral cue for those who are less involved or engaged with a particular issue or product (Biswas, et al., 2006; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983) More specifically, exposure to celebrity endorsements can promote a process of identification for members of a less informed or sophisticated audience, while exposure to an expert appeal is generally associated with a more involved process of internalization (Kelman, 1961). In sum, less engaged individuals may think very little about a product or issue, but given exposure to celebrity involvement--- whether in the form of a spokesperson, actor, endorsement, or testimonial--- the issue or product may appear to somehow be more central to everyday life. By identifying with the celebrity making the endorsement, subjects accept that the celebrity has influence on their lives, persuading them to express particular sentiments with respect to a product, issue, or brand (Kelman, 2006)

Taking advantage of the experimental design discussed at length below, the current study measures whether exposure to celebrity issue advocacy appeals has a positive impact on engagement with the global refugee crisis issue debate. Moreover, the effects of exposure to celebrity driven issue appeals are contrasted with the effects of exposure to expert driven issue appeals. Finally, the differential impact of video vs. text appeals is considered, recognizing that celebrity is connected with image and visibility and that visual or video images can promote a stronger, more involved connection with a recognized source than text-based appeals (Boorstin, 1961; Graber, 2001; Messaris, 1997). Applying the foregoing discussion to the current study, a second research question is therefore considered as a final point of inquiry:

RQ2: What is the net effect of exposure to celebrity issue advocacy messages?

Methods

Participants and Design

To test the hypotheses and examine the research questions outlined above, a four-condition (plus control) online survey experiment was conducted during the fall of 2009 at a large public university in the Midwest. Students were recruited from classes in the communications departments and were eligible to receive a small amount of extra course credit in exchange for their participation in the study. A total of 483 undergraduates participated in the online experiment between October 4 – 16, 2009.

Procedures and Stimuli

Online sessions began with a standard consent form that described the study as an investigation of "Evaluations of Issue Content." Randomly assigned to one of four conditions or the control group, each subject began by completing the same pre-test questionnaire that included measures of political interest, issue importance, media exposure by content type, political knowledge, celebrity favorability rankings, and political sophistication. Next, subjects randomly received one of four experimental stimuli or simply went on to answer the post-test questionnaire if they were part of the control group.

The four experimental stimuli provided information on recent developments in the global refugee crisis, contrasting the testimony and involvement of celebrity advocate and United Nations Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie with the testimony and involvement of an issue expert, Antonio Guterres, the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees and former Prime Minister of Portugal. Subjects in the first condition ($n = 96$) received a video clip of Angelina Jolie speaking at the World Refugee Day summit in June of 2009. Subjects in the second condition ($n = 100$) received a video clip of Antonio Guterres offering his message for World Refugee Day 2009. Both video clips were approximately three minutes in length and were taken from YouTube. Subjects in the third condition ($n = 78$) were given a June 18, 2009 CNN.com text article to read that highlighted Angelina Jolie's involvement with World Refugee Day 2009 and featured quotes from the actress and UN Goodwill Ambassador on the importance of the refugee issue. Subjects in the fourth condition ($n = 95$) were given a June 16, 2009 CNN.com text article that discussed the release of the U.N. Global Trends report on refugee issues and featured quotes on the state of the refugee crisis from U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres. Both articles were around 400 words long. Finally, the fifth condition ($n = 114$) served as the control and did not receive any stimulus material.

Following the stimulus material, subjects completed a post-test questionnaire that included measures of clip recall, receptivity toward celebrity issue involvement, situational involvement with the global refugee crisis, the appropriateness of celebrity involvement on a series of political issues, complacency, issue apathy, political efficacy, and key demographic considerations. The relevant measures used in the analyses are outlined below.

Key Measures

     Political Interest. Interest in following matters related to politics and government

($M = 2.30$, $SD = .95$) was measured on a five-point scale (1 = "never," 2 = "hardly at all,"

3 = "only now and then 4= "some of the time," 5 = "most of the time). Those who

indicated that they were "never" interested in matters related to politics and government

were recoded as "0" in the dataset[6].

     Political predispositions. Two measures of partisanship were used in the

analyses: party identification and political ideology. Subjects were asked to select their

party identification based on the following scale: (1 = "Democrat," 2 = "Republican," 3 =

"Independent," and 4 = "Something else/none of these"). This measure was then re-coded

for use in the analyses that follow (1= "Democrat," 0 = "all others"). The final sample

was 57% Democrat, 23% Republican, and 20 % Independent or other. Political ideology

($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.57$) was based on a single-item measure of self-reported political

ideology (1 = "strong liberal," to 7 = "strong conservative").

     Media use. Subjects were asked to assess the frequency (0 = "never" to 7= "seven

days a week,") with which they followed news about politics and public affairs in the past

week across a wide range of media outlets. Four different measures of media exposure

were used in the analyses that follow including: (1) the Internet ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 2.36$),

(2) "news from a cable station" such as *CNN, Fox News,* or *MSNBC,"* ($M = 1.20$, $SD =$

1.45), (3) "national network news program, such as *ABC World News with Charles*

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[6] By recoding those who are "never" interested in politics as zero, the political interest
measure was able to account for varying degrees of political interest as well as the
absence of interest in politics.

Gibson, NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams, or the *CBS Evening News with Katie Couric*," (M = .69, SD = 1.15), and (4) "national newspaper like *The New York Times, The Washington Post*, or *USA Today*," (M = 1.16 , SD = 1.67).

Political Knowledge and Sophistication. Two separate sets of items were used to measure the political knowledge and the political sophistication of the subjects participating in the study. A general political knowledge index (M =4.29, SD = .98) was constructed to reflect the number of correct responses to five standard political knowledge survey items: (1) "Do you happen to know what job or political position is currently held by Joe Biden?" (2) "Do you happen to know which political party currently holds a majority of seats in the US House of Representatives?" (3) "Which political party is more conservative, the Democrats or the Republicans," (4) "If Congress passes a bill, and it is vetoed by the President, how much of a majority is required for the US senate and House to override that veto?" and (5) "Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not, the President, Congress, or the Supreme Court?" The political knowledge index had a *KR-20* of 0.50. An index of political sophistication (M = 2.89, SD = 1.67) or more specialized political knowledge was constructed to reflect the number of correct responses to five more complex survey items including: (1) "What is the name of the President of Russia?" (2) "What is the name of the governor of your home state?" (3) "What are the names of the senators from your home state?" (4) "Recently a new justice was added to the Supreme Court. Please name this person," and (5) "President Obama recently gave a speech to a Joint Session of

Congress. What was the topic of this speech?" (correct answer was health care). The

political sophistication index had a *KR-20* of 0.56.

Issue Importance. Subjects were asked to indicate the political importance (1 =

"not at all important," to 5 = "extremely important,") of six different political issues (the

economy, the environment, the situation in Iraq, the global refugee crisis, health care, and

gay marriage). A measure of the mean importance of the global refugee crisis ($M = 2.94$,

$SD = .95$) is featured in the analyses that follow.

Favorability. Subjects were asked to provide their overall opinion or favorability

toward (1 = "very unfavorable," to 4 = "very favorable,") some people in the news

including: (1) Angelina Jolie ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.01$), (2) Stephen Colbert $(M = 2.36$, $SD =$

1.56), (3) Jon Stewart ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.48$), (4) Tiger Woods ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.00$), and

(5) Oprah Winfrey ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .97$).

Appropriateness of Issue Involvement. Subjects were given a set of six political

issues (the economy, the situation in Iraq, the global refugee crisis, health care, gay

marriage, and stem cell research) and asked to asses how appropriate "it is for celebrities

to get involved and campaign for others to support their view on the issue" using a 7-

point scale (1 = "not at all appropriate," to 7 = "extremely appropriate,"). The measure of

appropriateness of involvement with the global refugee crisis ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.43$) is

included in the analyses that follow.

Receptivity. A measure of receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue

politics ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.39$) reflected the mean response to four related statements

about celebrity involvement in issue politics (measured on a 7-point Likert scale where 1

= "strongly disagree," and 7 = "strongly agree,"). The original statements were: (1) "Celebrities should not get involved with political issues," (2) "I admire the celebrities who have been promoting political issues," (3) "I like that celebrities are drawing attention to political issues," and (4) "There have been too many celebrities talking about political issues." Before building an index, items 1 and 4 were recoded so that all statements were oriented in a positive direction. The final receptivity toward celebrity issue involvement index had a Cronbach's alpha of .86. The items were adapted from recent work by on celebrity advertising and politics (Austin, et al., 2008; Biswas, et al., 2006).

Situational Involvement. A measure of situational involvement ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.00$) was constructed to reflect the mean response to a series of five related statements about personal involvement with the issue of the global refugee crisis (agreement with items was measured on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree," and 7 = "strongly agree,"). The statements were: (1) "I'm interested in information about the global refugee crisis," (2) "I pay attention to information about the global refugee crisis," (3) "I actively seek out information concerning the global refugee crisis," (4) "I know a lot about the global refugee crisis," and (5) "I am very familiar with the current state of the global refugee crisis." The final situational involvement index had a Cronbach's alpha of .85. The items were adapted from recent work on celebrity endorsements and youth political engagement (Austin, et al., 2008).

Complacency. A measure of complacency ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.22$) toward the global refugee crisis was based on agreement (measured on a 7-point Likert scale where 1

= "strongly disagree," and 7 = "strongly agree,") with two correlated items ($r = .31, p <. 001$): (1) "There is no real need for me to be involved in the global refugee crisis," and (2): "The global refugee crisis will persist no matter who gets involved."

Apathy. A measure of apathy ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.26$) toward the global refugee crisis was based on agreement (measured on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree," and 7 = "strongly agree,") with two correlated items ($r = .70, p <. 001$): (1) "Keeping up on issues like the global refugee crisis takes too much time," and (2) "Staying informed about the global refugee crisis is too much trouble."[7]

Demographics. Finally, a few demographic items were included in the study to account for any variation that might exist in the subject pool. Key measures used in the analyses include gender (the combined dataset was 27% male; 73% female) and age (combined $M = 20.42$, $SD = 2.22$).

Results

A series of analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses and explore the research questions outlined above. The first analysis focused on examining what factors influenced situational involvement with the global refugee crisis issue debate. Table 1 displays the upon-entry and final standardized regression coefficients for a hierarchical OLS regression analysis examining which factors best predict situational involvement with the global refugee crisis. Hierarchical regression enters blocks of variables based on their assumed causal order, measuring the relative contribution of each variable block

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[7] The complacency and issue apathy measures were also adapted from recent work by Austin et al. (2008).

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above and beyond previously entered blocks. The upon-entry beta coefficients control for all variables entered into the model in the previous blocks as well as the other variables that were entered within the same block. The contribution of each subsequent block to explaining the variance in the dependent variable, situational involvement, is listed as the incremental R^2. The sum of the incremental R-squares is listed as the Final R^2, or the percent of the variance in the dependent variable, situational involvement, that is explained by the full model.

[Insert Table 5.1 about here.]

As Table 5.1 shows demographic variables only explained 0.4% of the variance in the dependent variable, situational involvement. In the final regression model, a slight negative relationship between age and situational involvement ($\beta = -.09$, $p < .05$) emerged as significant. The second block of the hierarchical regression model, incorporating political predispositions (*e.g.*, partisan identification, political ideology, and political interest) into the model explained an additional 12.6% of the variance in situational involvement, highlighting a significant positive relationship between political interest and situational involvement ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$) with the global refugee crisis. Significant relationships did not emerge between party identification, political ideology, and situational involvement.

The third block of the regression model, adding political input measures (*e.g.*, political knowledge, political sophistication, and perceived importance of the global refugee crisis) explained an additional 20.8% of the variance in situational involvement, pointing toward a strong significant positive relationship between perceived importance

of the global refugee crisis and situational involvement (β = .43 p < .001) and a marginally significant positive relationship between political sophistication and situational involvement (β = .07, p < .10). The fourth and next block of the regression model, incorporating measures of media use by outlet type (*e.g.,* weekly use of national newspapers, network TV news, cable TV news, and the Internet to learn about politics and public affairs) only explained an additional 1.4% of the variance in situational involvement with the global refugee crisis.

The fifth block of the regression model added measures of celebrity orientation to the analysis, explaining an additional 3.6% of the variance in situational involvement with the global refugee crisis. Specifically, this block of the regression model pointed toward a significant positive relationship between favorability toward Angelina Jolie and situational involvement (β = .11, p < .01) and between feelings of appropriateness of celebrity involvement on the global refugee issue and situational involvement (β = .16, p < .001). Interestingly, receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics was not a significant predictor of situational involvement with the global refugee crisis.

The sixth and final block of the regression model inserted dummy variables for each experimental condition into the analysis in order to determine whether there were any significant treatment effects impacting situational involvement with the global refugee crisis. This last block of the regression model explained an additional 1.3% of the variance in the dependent variable, situational involvement, and offered evidence of a significant negative relationship between exposure to expert text appeals and situational involvement (β = -.13, p < .01). In other words, subjects who read the expert text appeal

were significantly less likely to feel involved with the global refugee crisis issue debate, especially when compared to subjects who did not receive any experimental stimuli material. The final regression model explained 40.2% of the variance in the dependent variable, situational involvement with the global refugee crisis, showing that political interest, the perceived importance of the global refugee crisis, favorability toward Angelina Jolie, and feelings of appropriateness of celebrity involvement with the global refugee crisis positively predicted situational involvement with the issue debate. These findings offer interesting insight with respect to *RQ1* and suggest that situational involvement may be closely tied with prior issue opinions and approval of both the celebrity advocate and their involvement in the politics of the issue debate.

Table 5.2 displays the upon-entry and final standardized regression coefficients for the hierarchical OLS regression analysis examining variation in complacency toward the global refugee crisis issue debate. As Table 5.2 indicates, demographic variables explained 1.5% of the variance in the dependent variable, complacency, with females emerging as significantly less likely to express complacent attitudes toward the global refugee crisis ($\beta = -.10, p < .05$). The second block of the regression model inserting political predispositions into the analysis only explained an additional 3.3% of the variance in complacency and failed to offer evidence of any significant relationships between party identification, political ideology, political interest, and complacency.

[Insert Table 5.2 about here.]

The third block of the regression model incorporating political inputs into the analysis explained an additional 9.7% of the variance in the dependent variable,

complacency. The key relationship of interest in this third regression block is the strong

significant negative relationship between perceived importance of the global refugee

crisis and complacency ($\beta = -.23, p <. .001$). It is also interesting to note that general

political interest was initially significant when first entered into the model in the second

block of the regression, but that inserting perceived issue importance or issue specific

interest in this third block of the regression model explained away any significant

relationship between general political interest and complacent issue attitudes. The fourth

block of the regression model added measures of media use by content type to the

analysis yet only explained an additional 0.1% of the variance in complacency.

Measures of celebrity orientation were added to the analysis in the fifth block of

the regression model explaining an additional 4.8% of the variance in the dependent

variable and pointing toward significant negative relationships between receptivity

toward celebrity involvement in issue politics and complacency ($\beta = -.17, p < .10$) and

situational involvement with the global refugee crisis issue debate and complacency ($\beta =$

$-.12, p < .05$). This set of findings offers direct support for both *H1* and *H2* by confirming

that both receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics and situational

involvement with the global refugee crisis are negative predictors of complacency. In

other words, individuals who are more receptive toward the idea of celebrities

participating in issue politics and/or more involved with the global refugee crisis issue

debate are also less likely to express complacent attitudes at the issue level.

As a last step, the sixth and final block of the regression model incorporated

dummy variables for each of the experimental conditions in an effort to understand

whether there were any significant treatment effects present even after controlling for other variables of interest. This last regression block explained an additional 1.7% of the variance in the dependent variable, complacency, and offered evidence of a small positive relationship between exposure to celebrity text appeals and complacency ($\beta = .10, p < .05$). This finding offers interesting insight with respect to $RQ2$ and points toward the idea that celebrity text-based appeals may indeed have less of an impact than celebrity video appeals. The final regression model explained 21.1% of the variance in the dependent variable, complacency.

Table 5.3 presents the results of the last hierarchical OLS regression predicting variation in issue apathy. As Table 5.3 shows, the first block of the regression model incorporating demographic controls explains 0.5% of the variance in the dependent variable, issue apathy. The second block of the regression model adding political predispositions into the analysis explains an additional 6.5% of the variance in the dependent variable and just like the complacency model, offers evidence of an initial significant relationship between general political interest and the dependent variable.

[Insert Table 5.3 about here.]

The third block of the regression model considers the relationships between political inputs and issue apathy, offering evidence of significant negative relationships between perceived importance of the global refugee crisis and apathy ($\beta = -.23, p < .001$) and between political sophistication and apathy ($\beta = -.16, p < .001$). In other words, those who see the global refugee crisis as an important issue are less likely to be apathetic as are those with higher levels of political sophistication. The fourth block of the regression

model added measures of media use by content type to the analysis, again only explaining 0.1% of the variance in the dependent variable.

The fifth block of the regression model added measures of celebrity orientation into the analyses explaining an additional 1.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, issue apathy. Situational involvement emerged as a significant negative predictor of issue apathy (β = -.14, p < .01) thus offering support for *H3* by suggesting that individuals who feel more involved with the global refugee crisis are less likely to exhibit apathetic issue attitudes. At the same time, the model did not offer evidence of a significant relationship between receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics and issue apathy, thus corresponding nicely with the discussion presented above. As with the other models, the sixth and final regression block added dummy variables for each of the experimental conditions in order to determine whether there were any significant treatment effects present after controlling for other variables of interest. The model presents a marginally significant positive relationship between exposure to an expert text appeal and issue apathy. The full model explained 21.1% of the variance in the dependent variable, issue apathy.

In each of the three regression models presented above, significant treatment effects emerge after controlling for other variables of interest. Unfortunately, these significant treatment effects do not present a clear pattern of results. In the first model, those who were exposed to the expert text appeal were significantly less likely to feel involved with the global refugee crisis. In the second model, subjects exposed to the celebrity text appeal were more likely to express complacent attitudes at the issue level,

while in the third model, subjects exposed to the expert text appeal were marginally more likely to have apathetic issue attitudes. As a follow-up, a series of one-way ANOVA analyses were conducted in order to see whether each of the dependent variables of interest differed significantly across all conditions. Only the one-way ANOVA analysis for apathy yielded significant results $F(4,478) = 2.60, p < .05, \eta = .02$, confirming that levels of apathy do vary significantly across condition.

There are many possible explanations for this relatively inconsistent pattern of treatment effects. It may be that a short burst of exposure to either celebrity or expert issue appeals is not enough to sway situational involvement, complacency, or apathy at the issue level. It is also possible that either the perceived importance of the global refugee crisis or perceptions of the celebrity advocate's credibility and/or attractiveness may interact with exposure to varied stimuli. As a follow-up, two sets of interaction terms were constructed for use in additional analyses: (1) the interaction between perceived importance of the global refugee crisis and stimulus condition and (2) the interaction between favorability toward Jolie, the celebrity advocate, and stimulus condition. Standardized values were used to prevent possible problems of multicollinearity between the interaction terms and the component variable elements (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Alken, 2003). Significant interaction effects emerged for both the situational involvement and apathy models and are displayed in Table 5.4.

[Insert Table 5.4 about here.]

As Table 5.4 shows, the interaction between perceived issue importance and exposure to the expert text appeal had a significant negative effect ($\beta = -.08, p < .05$) on

situational involvement. This suggests that even for those who see the global refugee crisis as highly important, the expert text appeal may not have been very effective in making individuals feel more involved with the issue debate. Figure 5.1 offers a graphical representation of this significant interaction effect, showing that for those who think the global refugee crisis is a highly important issue, an expert text appeal does not have a strong positive effect on situational involvement, especially when compared to those who think the issue is highly important and were exposed to other stimuli materials or randomly assigned to the control cell.

[Insert Figure 5.1 about here.]

Turning toward a focus on issue apathy, the results first suggest that those who viewed the celebrity video clip and see the refugee issue as highly important were significantly less likely to express apathetic issue attitudes ($\beta = -.12, p < .01$). Figure 5.2 offers a graphical representation of this interaction effect and suggests that for those who view the refugee issue as highly important, being exposed to the celebrity video issue appeal has a negative effect on issue apathy, especially when compared to those who feel the issue is highly important but are exposed to other stimuli material or randomly assigned to the control group. For those who do not see the global refugee issue as very important, being exposed to the celebrity video appeal has a less positive effect on apathy especially when compared to those who see the refugee issue as less important and were exposed to the other stimuli or randomly assigned to the control group. This finding corresponds nicely with the discussion of the possible indirect effect of favorability toward the celebrity source on public opinion and issue engagement presented earlier.

[Insert Figure 5.2 about here.]

At the same time, as Figure 5.3 shows, the results also suggest that those who have more favorable impressions of Jolie and were exposed to the celebrity video clip were significantly more likely to express apathetic issue attitudes ($\beta = .14, p < .001$) than those who have highly favorable impressions of Jolie and were exposed to other stimuli or randomly assigned to the control group. Alternatively, those who have less favorable impressions of Jolie and were exposed to the celebrity video appeal were less likely to express apathetic issue attitudes especially when compared to those who have less favorable impressions of Jolie and were exposed to the other stimuli material or randomly assigned to the control. This finding runs counter to expectations and might be partially attributed to the lack of variance in favorability ratings for Jolie as compared to the variance in favorability ratings for other visible celebrities. For example, subjects gave Jolie a fairly average favorability score ($M = 2.32, SD = 1.01$) and attitudes toward Jolie were the same for both male ($M = 2.31, SD = 1.14$) and female subjects ($M = 2.32, SD = .95$) participating in the experiment. Other celebrities evaluated in the study had higher favorability ratings that also differed significantly depending upon the gender of the subject. For example, Oprah's average favorability score was higher than Jolie's ($M = 2.93, SD = 0.97$) and was also significantly higher for female subjects ($M = 3.09 \, SD = .83$) as opposed to male subjects ($M = 2.48, SD = 1.17$), while Tiger Woods also scored

high overall (M = 2.95, SD = 1.00) but had significantly higher favorability ratings among male subjects (M = 3.14, SD = .97) than female subjects (M = 2.88, SD = 1.01)[8].

[Insert Figure 5.3 about here.]

All in all, these additional models provide interesting insight with respect to *RQ2* and suggest that the influence of celebrity and expert issue appeals may not be as straightforward as previously thought. This mixed pattern of interactive effects suggest that it will be important to compare and contrast the efforts of a variety of celebrity issue advocates in future work, especially since favorability toward the celebrity advocate can have a differential impact upon exposure to targeted appeals. In addition, it is clear that future work should consider not only the favorability of celebrity issue advocates but also whether their appeal is universal or particular to gender.

Discussion

Given the blurring boundaries between entertainment and politics and celebrity and politician, this study examines the net influence of celebrity involvement in issue politics on public opinion and political engagement at the issue level. Contrasting Angelina Jolie's activism on the global refugee crisis with that of an issue expert, Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the research considers what factors influence situational involvement, complacency, and issue apathy. The results suggest that prior perceptions of the issue's importance influence engagement with the issue debate and that favorability toward the celebrity advocate and the perceived

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[8] It is important to point out that the study was conducted in October 2009 well before Tiger Woods' marital problems were the subject of intense media scrutiny.

appropriateness of celebrity involvement on the issue positively influence situational involvement. Receptivity toward celebrity political involvement in issue politics has a negative impact on complacency but no effect on issue apathy. At the same time, situational involvement with the issue debate is negatively related to both complacency and issue apathy. Finally, the results suggest that exposure to celebrity issue advocacy messages can impact issue engagement -- but it is important to point out that this impact often depends on the prior perceived importance of the issue and the favorability ratings of the celebrity advocate. Taken together, the results suggest that celebrity involvement in issue politics can positively influence public opinion and political engagement at the issue level but that more research is needed to tease out the precise impact of targeted exposure to celebrity and/or expert issue advocacy messages.

Before concluding, it is important to acknowledge some limitations of the current study. First, it is worth noting that the experiment focuses on just one issue, the global refugee crisis, as a case study. While the global refugee crisis has received a lot of attention from politicians, celebrities, the media, and world organizations, it is just one of many pressing global concerns. In truth, the global refugee crisis is a valence or easy political issue, one that is free from political controversy especially when compared to hard or controversial that require individuals to adopt a position or take a stance on the issue in question (Rabinowitz, Prothro, & Jacoby, 2009). While the global refugee crisis presents an excellent case study, it is important to point out that the effects of exposure to celebrity issue advocacy appeals may differ given a more controversial or position issue. Moreover, while Angelina Jolie sits at the top of the Forbes Celebrity 100 list and is one

of the most visible of celebrity advocates, it is important to point out that she is just one of many celebrities who are actively engaged in national and international concerns. While Antonio Guterres, in his position as UN High Commissioner for Refugees may be the official expert on the topic, there are other non-celebrities who have spoken out on the global refugee crisis as well. Further, while Jolie and Guterres are both actively involved on the issue, they have very different public personas. Familiarity with and favorability towards both varies widely --- among members of the subject pool and even more broadly, among the general population. More generally, evaluations of a celebrity advocate's credibility, favorability, likability, attractiveness and perceived similarity with the self vary across gender. While both male and female subjects were equally lukewarm towards Jolie in this particular experimental case, it is clear that the gender of the celebrity and expert advocates and also of individual members of a given subject/sample pool will need to be carefully considered in related future research.

Second, by varying the experimental stimuli, subjects who were not in the control group were either exposed to a celebrity video, expert video, celebrity text, or expert text appeal. While the stimuli were carefully selected and matched in terms of content, length, and date of appearance, thus allowing for an internally valid experimental design, the experimental set-up still relies on an artificial environment (Iyengar, forthcoming). In truth, individuals interested in learning more about the global refugee crisis would likely encounter a variety of relevant issue content across multiple formats, featuring the testimony of both celebrity and expert advocates. Third, it is important to point out that the subjects participating in the study were undergraduates enrolled in communications

courses at a major public university in the midwestern United States. As a result, the findings presented here are not generalizable to the larger population. Rather, the results may point toward attenuated relationships between exposure to celebrity issue advocacy appeals and issue engagement (*e.g.,* situational involvement, complacency, and apathy) given a sample population that is both more receptive toward and more in tune with celebrity culture from the outset. A more diverse subject pool might actually display stronger effects given varied exposure to celebrity and expert issue advocacy appeals.

Despite these limitations, the current study contributes to our understanding of the net impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics. First, receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics was negatively related to issue complacency, and the study as a whole points toward the idea that those who are more accepting of celebrity involvement in issue politics are also more engaged politically. Moreover, greater interest in and involvement with the issue debate was a negative predictor of both complacency and issue apathy. At the same time, exposure to an expert appeal alone did not point toward greater engagement with the issue debate.

More specifically, the results suggest that the success of celebrity appeals is closely tied to the prior perceived importance of the issue and the perceived favorability of the celebrity advocate. The global refugee crisis was listed as the sixth most important issue by subjects participating in the experiment, yet was also seen as the issue most appropriate for celebrities to address. It is possible that celebrity advocacy on issues that are perceived to be more important may have a larger effect on public opinion and political engagement, but this may also depend upon whether the issue is seen as a safe or

appropriate matter for celebrities to address. Future research on the impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics should incorporate a range of issues and varying perceptions of appropriateness of celebrity involvement. As discussed earlier, future research should also consider the impact of a wide range of celebrity advocates, from the highly favorable, to the less well-known, to the polarizing or controversial, and finally to those with relatively lukewarm favorability ratings.

For non-profit political organizations looking to draw attention toward their cause, matching a credible and attractive celebrity advocate with the appropriate issue debate may be a strategy worth pursuing. Celebrity involvement can bring added media and political attention to the cause and perhaps even encourage higher levels of engagement with the issue debate, particularly among young people. At the same time, this new area of involvement may be a bonus for Hollywood celebrities looking to maintain and enhance their public image and for expert advocates who are not nearly as well known or instantly recognizable. As the Hollywood-Washington connection deepens and the line between celebrity and politician continues to blur, celebrity issue advocacy may become an even larger part of our contemporary political landscape.

CHAPTER 6: OVERALL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation project sought to consider how political entertainment is redefining our shared media and political experience. Cognizant of the ever-changing dynamics of the post-broadcast media environment, the first half of the project focused on political humor and comedy by first building off of prior work on political entertainment and soft news. The first major investigation considered the differential impact of diverse comedy forms on political attitudes, while the second major investigation considered how changing patterns of media consumption for both traditional news and political entertainment influence political trust and internal political efficacy. The first half of the dissertation project addressed gaps in the current body of research on political comedy by first considering various forms of comedy in context, simultaneously studying the properties of other-directed and self-directed humor and audience evaluations of relevant content. In addition, the research studied the effect of exposure to political comedy on two key political variables of interest (*e.g.*, trust and efficacy), measured the effects of exposure to a diverse selection of comedy content, and situated the investigation within the larger post-broadcast media environment.

The second part of the project extended the boundaries of political entertainment research to study the net impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics on public opinion and political engagement. Essentially the second part of the project considers what happens when the entertainer becomes a "political actor." The third major investigation assessed the current state of celebrity politics in the post-2008 election

environment by considering which issues were appropriate for celebrities to address, general receptivity toward celebrity involvement in issue politics, and the net impact of celebrity political involvement on evaluations of internal political efficacy. Finally, the fourth major investigation considered whether exposure to celebrity issue appeals and receptivity toward celebrity political involvement had an effect on public opinion and political engagement at the issue level. Using Angelina Jolie's involvement with the global refugee crisis as a case study, this last piece considered the impact of celebrity political involvement on situational involvement, complacency, and issue apathy. Taken together, the results of these four independent yet related investigations tell us quite a lot about the dynamic nature of our contemporary media and political experience. Before discussing the contributions of the dissertation project and the implications for the field of communication research, it is first important to point out some of the limitations of the study designs and address relevant internal, external, and ecological validity concerns that naturally surface given a reliance on experimental data.

Experimental Data: Strengths and Limitations

Building upon a rich tradition of "experimental modification of attitudes and beliefs through communication," the dissertation relies on a series of controlled experiments to isolate and measure post-stimuli variation in key attitudinal measures (Hovland, 1951, p. 424; Hovland, et al., 1949). In designing controlled experiments, it is important to achieve internal and external validity, making sure that the experiment measures what the researchers initially set out to measure in a manner that closely

approximates real world conditions and is consistent with previous research. A well-designed experiment is carefully constructed so as to only manipulate one key concept or variable, holding all other items constant and in turn avoiding potential category and/or case confounds (Hovland, 1951; Hovland, et al., 1949; Polk, et al., 2009). In reality, however, controlled experiments tend to sit along a sliding scale, balancing the demands associated with achieving both internal and external validity – in other words there is a degree of intersubjectivity inherent to the experimental design process. Before reviewing the elements of the two study designs featured in this dissertation in particular, it is first important to outline some of the larger, macro-level validity concerns that are a central part of all experiment-based communications research efforts. Specifically, it is important to address more macro-level concerns related to: (1) internal validity, (2) the captive audience, (3) generalizability, (4) surface representativeness, and (5) category-case confounds.

An experiment that achieves internal validity utilizes a carefully constructed questionnaire that is exclusively comprised of well-tested, reliable, previously verified measures. Importantly, a well-designed questionnaire often privileges a post-test only design, measuring initial, more generic items (*e.g.,* political interest, media exposure) in the pre-test and only including measures that tap post-exposure variation in the later portion of the questionnaire so as to not bias subjects' responses or experience with the stimuli material (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). An internally valid questionnaire pays careful attention to randomizing the items that fall within particular question blocks and the precise ordering of questions in the pre and post-test questionnaires. Finally, an

internally valid design is cognizant of the limitations of the subject pool --- a good experiment should only last for a reasonable amount of time and not be too taxing for members of the subject pool. Questionnaires should be careful to maintain and respect clear length and time limitations. Stimuli should be carefully chosen and achieve similar length, format, and presentation styles.

Unfortunately, those who are recruited to participate in an experiment are part of a captive audience and are aware that their behavior and preferences are under observation (Hovland, 1959). This is particularly true given a lab-based setting and is similar to the Hawthorne effect so often discussed in classic psychological studies (Adair, 1984). In fact, subjects are almost completely unable to tune out the lab-based experiment experience, likely paying more attention to the stimuli material than they would given a more normal set of circumstances. In general, results from experimental studies are reflective of a surreal rather than accurate environment, ultimately influenced by higher than normal levels of exposure and attention. It is important that researchers recognize this dynamic when interpreting the findings of experimental research. At present, scholars like Iyengar (forthcoming) and others recognize the limitations of the lab-based setting, yet tend to argue that since this has become the standard practice in communications research, the problem of the captive audience is of minimal concern. In fact, for some, the benefits of a lab-based setting (*i.e.,* controlled environment, consistent technology, and limited access to the Internet or other dynamic technology) have come to overshadow some of the limitations. For others, the move towards online remote studies alleviates some of the captive audience problems that are inherent in artificial lab based

experimental set-ups. Ultimately, however, a good lab-based study attempts to make the research environment mimic or resemble real-world conditions in the attempt to promote a more valid experimental design.

Both studies were designed with an eye towards generalizability. An experiment that achieves high external validity should be able to be easily replicated among a new group of subjects that share the original characteristics of the primary sampling frame. The results of an externally valid experiment should speak to the nature of the specific group under study and be easily applied given a new context or geographic location (Shapiro, 2002). Moreover, the findings from a generalizable study conducted among college students at one university should be able to represent and speak to the dynamics of students at other similarly categorized universities. Study 1 clearly adhered to this principle given its portability and the consistent results achieved at two university campuses. Study 2 could have easily been replicated in a similar fashion. With both studies, alternative stimuli material could later be inserted into the general design framework to enable further tests of the same key concepts given the presence of a new issue debate or content from future election cycles.

In a similar fashion, a strong experimental design needs to achieve surface representativeness (Shapiro, 2002). More specifically, the stimuli chosen for particular experimental studies need to best represent realistic content that would be readily available and consumed in the non-experimental environment. In other words, a study on political comedy should feature material that represents the heart of the real political comedy viewing experience. Similarly, a study on the persuasive effects of PSAs and

advertising messages should present content that is truly representative of contemporary and available PSAs and advertising messages. If the content in an experiment does not match the real world material or concept under study, the design will clearly suffer from concerns about the external validity or ecological validity of the research.

Finally, it is important that an experimental design carefully limit variation across conditions (Hovland, et al., 1953; Hovland, et al., 1949). The ideal experiment should slightly modify just one element across conditions in an effort to capture post-exposure attitudinal variation that is directly linked to that particular modification or manipulation (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Hovland, 1951). Designs that try to achieve too much at once or that include multiple manipulations introduce the problem of the case-category confound (Polk, et al., 2009). In other words, experiments that alter the content along with the topic and other elements across conditions are then unable to ascertain whether the results can be attributed to the main manipulation or are the result of some other confounding factors. The variation or change across and between conditions should be subtle in a controlled experimental design; in almost all cases a parsimonious and limited design works best.

Dissertation Design

Both Study 1 and Study 2 rely on post-test only designs in an attempt to ensure that the measurement of key independent variables is not tainted by a history of prior questioning (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Each study includes either a pure control or approximate version of a control group and carefully randomizes subjects' assignment to

conditions. While both study environments were relatively artificial (particularly the lab environment as compared to the online experiment), steps were taken to make both environments seem as realistic as possible (Iyengar, forthcoming). What the studies may have lacked in authenticity, they made up for in controlled variation.

For each experiment, the stimuli materials were carefully selected only after a comprehensive and exhaustive review of related material. Considerable effort was made to ensure the generalizability of the stimuli material and all of the selected pieces were comparable in terms of length, content, outlook, and layout. Both experiments carefully controlled variation, measuring attitudinal changes after exposure to one rather than multiple stimuli. Both questionnaires included reliable measures, replicating or slightly modifying measures used in previous experimental studies and public opinion polls to maximize internal validity. Pre-test measures like political interest, partisan identification, perceptions of issue importance, and celebrity favorability were used in the analyses in order to control for subjects' motivation to process the experimental stimuli. Taken together, the experiments were designed to help better understand relevant theory given a change in communication conditions (Hovland, 1951). While the experiments did not measure delayed or "sleeper effects," few experiments today rarely do. In sum, the experiments were designed to be as comparable as possible to real world conditions, carefully navigating the often subjective balance between achieving internal validity and maximizing external or ecological validity. Overall, both experimental set-ups achieve surface representativeness, work to minimize the problem of the captive audience, are generalizable and easy to replicate, are as free from the limitations of case-category

confounds as possible, and grounded by valid pre and post-test questionnaires that rely on the most reliable and proven measures available.

Study 1: Data and Review

In examining the differential impact of diverse comedy forms on political attitudes, Study 1 randomly exposed subjects to one of six experimental stimuli. The first four conditions were replicated across both campuses (UW-Madison and LSU) and serve as the basis for the analyses presented in the first article. Each condition received an approximately two and a half minute long video clip offering commentary on the final days of the McCain-Palin 2008 presidential campaign. Subjects assigned to the first condition viewed the self-directed humor clip featuring John McCain making fun of himself and his campaign on *Saturday Night Live's Weekend Update*. As a contrast, subjects in the second condition viewed the other-directed hostile humor clip featuring Stephen Colbert making fun of John McCain and his struggling campaign organization. Subjects in the third condition viewed a straight news clip with John Harwood of *The New York Times* giving a very factual, traditional report on the state of the McCain-Palin campaign during its final days. This third condition acted as an approximate control given its traditional, standard news format and was the benchmark against which exposure to other conditions was measured. Those assigned to the fourth condition viewed a two and a half minute compilation of attack ads targeted against the McCain campaign and run by the Obama campaign during the final weeks of the election cycle. Including these ads helped to better approximate the campaign media environment and offered another

example of hostile content, albeit hostile content that was intended to be vicious, not funny. The choice to include the straight news cell as the control as opposed to an unrelated video clip was deliberate. The straight news clip provided a more realistic approximation of the true campaign environment and served as a natural contrast to the comedy and ads material. Further, adding a pure control cell would have meant adding yet another condition (a seventh at UW-Madison) to the experiment, spreading out the random assignment of respondents to condition across more groups --- thus resulting in smaller n sizes across conditions and less confidence in the power of the results.

While the chosen stimuli represented the best clips from the 2008 election cycle tapping the other-directed vs. self-directed humor distinction, it is important to recognize that they are not perfect stimuli. It is possible that subjects may have found both clips funny, failing to see Colbert's performance as truly hostile given pre-existing perceptions of *The Colbert Report* or prior experience viewing the show. This would introduce a hostile vs. funny confound into the study design. At the same time, the results suggest that those exposed to Colbert's other-directed hostile humor did have more negative attitudes toward McCain after exposure, especially when compared to those exposed to either the straight news control or self-directed humor stimuli. Moreover, both Democratic and Republican viewers evaluated McCain more negatively after viewing the Colbert clip, so the results did support the claim that Colbert's presentation is more hostile than friendly -- irrespective of party identification.

It is also important to note that the clips did feature the same criticisms and jokes about McCain. In the October 29, 2008 clip, Colbert poked fun at McCain for being old

or "nearly dead," compared his campaign to "a flaming bag of poop dropped on America's door step," and suggested that the media had already counted McCain out of the running (Colbert, 2008, October 29). In the November 1, 2008 *Saturday Night Live* clip McCain called himself a "Sad Grandpa" when making fun of his age, suggested alternate strategies to save his suffering campaign, and commented on the media's evaluation of his poor campaign performance ("Saturday Night Live," 2008, November 1). Given the timing and content of the two clips, it should be clear that they offer a fairly consistent picture of the troubled McCain campaign.

An outside observer could argue that for the clips to be a truly valid test of the differential impact of diverse forms of humor, the stimuli would need to be drawn from the same comedy program. In other words, the ideal would have been to expose subjects to Colbert making fun of John McCain and then McCain making fun of himself on *The Colbert Report*. The reality, however, is that *The Colbert Report* does not offer a viable platform for candidate appearances during the final days of an election cycle. Programs like *Saturday Night Live*, network comedy programs like *Late Night with David Letterman*, and sometimes even *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* are the standard route for this type of self-directed performance. In sum, despite potential criticisms, the chosen stimuli clips best represent the humor of the 2008 election cycle and best approximate the real campaign environment, thus achieving what Shapiro (2002) refers to as surface representativeness. In other words, since the clips reflect how humor works in a competitive election cycle, they achieve external and ecological validity and provide a truly realistic comparison of content.

Finally, it is important to note that each condition received only one video stimulus clip. While some might suggest that a more robust test of the differential impacts of diverse forms of humor should include exposure to more than one self-directed and other-directed humor clip, doing so would have created too much variability within the experimental design. By using one clip in each condition, the experiment favored an environment of controlled variation, overshadowing concerns of a potential case-category confound (Hovland, 1951; Polk, et al., 2009). All told, featuring additional clips with other political figures would have introduced too much noise into the experimental design. At the same time, the experiment was designed to test our underlying theoretical assumptions about the processing of political comedy, thus helping to contribute toward our understanding of the social meaning of political humor and the range of social behaviors connected with exposure to diverse comedy forms. While the current study only featured one video stimuli clip in each condition, the experiment could easily be replicated given new or alternate video stimuli. Overall, the current experimental design achieves external validity given the study's inherent generalizability across messages, comic targets, election cycles, and finally members of the same sampling frame (Shapiro, 2002). In sum, the experimental stimuli employed in this study achieved surface representativeness, offered us the opportunity to understand how exposure to diverse forms of humor shapes the way we make meaning of our campaign media environment, and allowed us to isolate key attitudinal effects of interest.

Two additional cells were included in the Wisconsin experiment in order to enable a test of another comedy form – political parody. Subjects in the fifth and sixth

conditions were exposed to video stimuli highlighting Sarah Palin's campaign performance. Subjects in the fifth condition ($n = 49$) watched a five and a half minute video clip of Amy Poehler and Tina Fey's September 27, 2008 *SNL* parody of the real Palin-Couric interview. Subjects in the sixth condition ($n = 48$) watched a five and a half minute video clip from the actual Sarah Palin interview with Katie Couric that aired on the *CBS Evening News* in September of 2008. Unfortunately a separate analysis of these cells did not yield interesting or significant results. This may be largely explained by the small sample size of these additional cells and the reality that only a handful of Republicans were present in each cell. Alternatively, it may be that subjects viewed both clips as negative portrayals of Palin as the parody version of the interview used much of the original interview text as a script. It may also be the case that Sarah Palin is a very different comic target, especially when compared to politicians like John McCain. In any event, while this particular parody analysis was not fruitful, it will be important to study the impact of political parody in future research, ideally comparing the effects of exposure to other-directed humor, self-directed humor, and political parody targeted at the same political actor.

Study 1 was conducted in the lab, an artificial environment to be sure with a captive audience (Iyengar, forthcoming). While subjects usually watch political comedy programs at home on television or on the Internet -- often with a group of friends -- it was not possible to replicate this more realistic setting in the lab environment. While lab experiments are not ideal, they are the standard for this type of communications study and are appropriate here, especially given the need to randomize subjects across six

conditions and to replicate parts of the study at a second campus location. In addition, using the lab set-up meant that all subjects viewed the clips using the same computer technology, same sound quality, and video resolution. Plus, a distractor video task featuring a *PBS* video clip on the growing number of homeless school children was included in all six conditions and helped to mask the study's true purpose. This distractor task was intended to serve as the stimulus for a separate study of political learning and attentiveness; its inclusion helped to better approximate the TV viewing environment (Iyengar, forthcoming). Finally, subjects were first invited to participate in a study entitled, "Perceptions of Online Video Content," so there was no initial mention of political comedy.

Study 2: Data and Review

Study 2 considered the net impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics on public opinion and political engagement. Subjects participating in Study 2 were randomly assigned to one of five online experimental cells, either one of the four treatment conditions featuring varied stimuli or the control cell that simply required subjects to complete the pre and post-test questionnaires. All four stimuli addressed the current state of the global refugee crisis and were taken from materials originally first made publicly available in June of 2009. Subjects in the first condition viewed a three-minute video clip of Angelina Jolie offering testimony on her experience with the global refugee crisis issue debate during the World Refugee Day 2009 summit. Subjects in the second condition viewed a three-minute video clip of Antonio Guterres offering his message for

World Refugee Day in his official capacity as UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The third and fourth conditions presented varied text stimuli. Subjects in the third condition read a June 18, 2009 CNN.com article highlighting Angelina Jolie's involvement with World Refugee Day 2009 which featured quotes from the actress/UN Goodwill Ambassador. Subjects in the fourth condition read a June 16, 2009 CNN.com text article discussing the release of the UN Global Trends report on refugee issues which featured quotes from UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres. Both articles had the same layout, overall design, and were approximately 400 words in length. Subjects in the fifth cell were not asked to view or read any stimuli material and were treated as a pure control group, only answering standard pre and post-test questions.

It is important to point out that Study 2 only focused on one political issue, the global refugee crisis. The issue was chosen in part because of the presence of a visible, primary celebrity advocate who is incredibly well known for both her activism and her Hollywood box office success. In reality, Jolie's position at the top of the Forbes Celebrity 100 list makes her a natural choice for a case study. Moreover, the global refugee crisis has a credible issue expert in Antonio Guterres, especially given his official appointment as UN High Commissioner for Refugees and his prior experience as the Prime Minister of Portugal. In sum, the global refugee crisis issue debate offered a clean, natural contrast between a visible celebrity advocate and a reliable issue expert. While one could argue that focusing on more than one issue debate and adding another celebrity advocate and issue expert into the mix would have offered a more robust test of the net impact of celebrity involvement in issue politics on public opinion and political

engagement and helped to eliminate a potential case-category confound, doing so would have introduced too much variability into the experimental design (Polk, et al., 2009).

In fact, initial design sketches for the celebrity study included stimuli materials for two issues: (1) the valence issue of the global refugee crisis, and (2) the position issue of embryonic stem cell research. Stimuli featuring celebrity advocate Michael J. Fox were carefully selected along with video testimony from a scientific expert's appearance on a network morning news program. Similar text based content was also selected. In the end, I chose to center the study on Jolie and the global refugee crisis so as to avoid the need for a potentially nine group experimental design. It was initially decided that combining the two issues in each condition (celebrity video, expert video, celebrity text, and expert text) would have introduced too much noise and variation into the design even if the order of the content rotated within each cell. In addition, including a position issue and a celebrity advocate who is so closely affected by the particular issue (Michael J. Fox given his advanced Parkinson's symptoms) would have introduced too many potential confounds in the design. While the juxtaposition of a celebrity female (Jolie) against a relatively unknown male expert (Antonio Guterres) also introduces potential confounds, this trimmed-down experimental design offered an environment that favored more controlled variation than a larger two-issue experiment. Moreover, since most celebrity political activity seems to center around non-controversial, valence issues, it made sense to focus on the global refugee crisis rather than a more controversial issue like embryonic stem cell research that requires that individuals adopt a position or stance on the issue (Meyer & Gamson, 1995). In addition, the issue of embryonic stem cell research is

particularly salient in Wisconsin while the global nature of the refugee crisis makes the issue seem less pressing. In sum then, in its present form, the experiment favored an environment of controlled variation (Hovland, 1951). By starting with a valence or easy issue, any interesting analyses could be more easily replicated in future studies that chose to focus on position or hard political issues.

The stimuli featured in the experiment were carefully chosen and were all from the same mid-June 2009 time period. Both text articles were from CNN.com and matched in terms of layout, content, and outlook. The YouTube videos matched in terms of length, style, and appearance. Plus, both were taken from footage of the World Refugee Day June 2009 summit. The presentation of the stimuli was fairly seamless given the online experiment environment. The YouTube videos were embedded within the relevant conditions and the screen mirrored the size and set-up of the traditional YouTube viewing environment. The text articles were made to appear as if they were simply lifted from the CNN.com site and inserted into the experiment on a blank screen. Thus, all treatment conditions were designed to approximate either the real YouTube or online news viewing environments. Conducting the experiment online rather than in the lab promoted a less artificial, more realistic study environment (Iyengar, forthcoming). Finally, by having a pure control as the fifth cell, in which subjects simply completed the pre and post-test questionnaires but did not view any stimuli material, it was easier to separate out the unique effects of each condition.

The pre-test questionnaire was purposely designed to be shorter than the post-test questionnaire, avoiding pre-test questions that would bias the subjects' responses to the

The Colbert Report and more likely to be in touch with celebrity culture, it is important to point out that the results are not generalizable to the larger population. Moreover, the results present a snapshot of younger individuals enrolled in four-year degree programs at major public universities and are therefore also not generalizable to the larger population of younger individuals. While the studies were essentially conducted among members of a convenience sample, all participating subjects were randomly assigned to the various conditions and the sample featured a mix of younger and older undergraduates from diverse regions of the country. These experimental studies can certainly serve as the basis for more representative, national, and better funded future studies and the presented results may actually reflect attenuated snapshots of the precise relationships that exist between exposure to political comedy, traditional news content, celebrity advocacy messaging, expert issue appeals and relevant attitudinal and behavioral measures like candidate evaluations, issue importance, internal political efficacy, political trust, receptivity toward celebrity political involvement and issue engagement (*e.g.,* situational involvement, complacency, apathy) (Iyengar, forthcoming). At the same time, given that the two experiments were carefully designed to achieve external validity, the results should remain consistent even when replicating both studies among new yet similar samples of college students (Shapiro, 2002).

Every effort was made to use reliable, proven, well-tested measures. Key concepts were copied or adapted from prior studies (*i.e.,* experiments in mass communications research, the American National Election Study, etc.) or public opinion polls conducted by major reputable national organizations like Gallup, CNN/Opinion Research

Corporation, or the Pew Research Center. All of the secondary data referred to in the dissertation was also taken from polling organizations with sound methodological approaches. While some of the reliabilities or correlations could have been a bit stronger, particularly the complacency measure featured in the second study, all of the key measures were carefully chosen and represent the best available combination of items.

Experimental studies allow researchers to better understand theory given a change in communication conditions, carefully control variation, and isolate key concepts of interest (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Hovland, 1951; Hovland, et al., 1949; Iyengar, forthcoming). The experiments featured in this dissertation were deliberately designed to best approximate real world conditions (*i.e.,* attain surface representativeness) and were carefully constructed to achieve ecological validity (Shapiro, 2002). Methodologically speaking, these experimental studies offered an excellent forum through which to explore relevant theoretical questions and test well-formed hypotheses. At the same time, it goes without saying that future research would benefit from multiple methodological approaches. Given more time and resources, one important extension of this research would be to conduct surveys among a more representative segment of the population and/or comedy viewing audience. In addition, an audience reception study could complement existing research. At present, however, the findings presented from these experimental studies help us to better understand how political entertainment is redefining our shared media and political experience.

Conclusions and Key Contributions

The dissertation project set out to understand how political entertainment is redefining our shared mass media and political experience. The results of the various investigations highlight the importance of understanding how individuals make choices about content, evaluate new materials, and apply what they've seen and learned to inform their own political choices, expression, and opinions. Overall, the project suggests that there is a need to dig deeper in order to understand how the diversity of the post-broadcast experience is eroding traditional boundaries between news and entertainment and celebrity and politician, thus redefining the mediated political experience.

The results of the second investigation suggest that exposure to political comedy has a more significant impact on personal politics, or internal political efficacy, rather than political trust or evaluations of political institutions. At the same time, the results of the first investigation show that audience members process diverse forms of comedy differentially; exposure to other-directed humor can have a negative effect on related political attitudes while exposure to self-directed humor can have a warming or positive effect on political attitudes. Taken together, the findings from Study 1 suggest that it is important to understand the net impact of exposure to political comedy at the individual or micro level. Rather than treat comedy as one monolithic form or focus on how exposure to political comedy impacts cynicism or broader metrics of civic and political engagement, it is important for research to tease out the precise impact of a whole range of comedy forms on the individual political experience. Drawing upon previous research on the effects of political comedy, the first part of this dissertation project begins this

more in-depth investigation. Future research will need to continue to extend this line of inquiry.

Results presented from Study 2 suggest that celebrities do have an impact on political life and that it is important to understand the influence of celebrity politics on public opinion and political engagement. The findings from the third investigation suggest that there are certain issues that are appropriate for celebrities to address (*i.e.,* less important political issues), while certain political issues are best left to issue experts or politicians. Younger individuals are receptive toward celebrity involvement in issue politics, but as the results of the third investigation show, we are not yet able to understand the net impact of exposure to celebrity politics at the individual level. The fourth investigation suggests that receptivity toward celebrity issue politics and exposure to celebrity issue appeals can impact situational involvement, complacency, and issue apathy, promoting greater engagement with a particular issue debate. At the same time, the impact of celebrity and expert issue appeals can depend on the prior perceived importance of a given political issue and favorability toward the chosen celebrity advocate. Taken together, the findings from Study 2 suggest that as the lines between celebrity and politician continue to blur, it will be important to better understand the net impact of celebrity politics at the issue level, moving beyond current work on celebrity politics and candidate endorsements and GOTV appeals. This second part of the dissertation project presents preliminary work on celebrity involvement in issue politics, leaving the door open for future research efforts.

On the whole, the project suggests that the traditional media and political experience has eroded, leaving a very diverse, temporal, and fragmented mediated political experience in its place. We are no longer experiencing the same "media events" but rather consciously striking a balance between news and entertainment -- all the while picking and choosing the content we want to watch by using sites like YouTube and Hulu and devices like TiVo or digital video recorders (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Prior, 2007). Similarly, we can self-select Internet and print news content, only reading and reviewing material that agrees with our political perspective or point-of-view (Sunstein, 2007). In becoming the "me" media generation, we have created a new, individualized post-broadcast media experience that will be the focus of future communication research efforts for quite some time to come (Turow, 2006).

This new, individualized media experience has promoted a "viral marketing" approach to sharing media content. For young viewers interested in politics, keeping up-to-date with the latest *SNL* skits and clips from *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, network comedy programs and YouTube has become an important part of what it means to stay informed. With social networking sites like Facebook allowing users to link to key pieces of content and the actual web sites for *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* and aggregator sites like Hulu archiving each episode by clip or segment, it has become even easier to suggest important pieces of media content. Since part of "getting the joke," means staying current with recent content, it has become all the more important for young viewers to click through to see the latest relevant clip. This fragmented viewing behavior has contributed to Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert's status as cultural icons,

making the viewing of important interview and public appearances (*e.g.,* Jon Stewart's

appearance on *CNN's Crossfire*, Stephen Colbert's 2006 roast of then President George

W. Bush at the White House Correspondents' Dinner, and Jon Stewart's interview on *The*

O'Reilly Factor) another important component of staying informed. In fact, comic

appearances and performances have become more important news items than traditional

campaign fare, as evidenced by data from the 2008 election cycle showing that more

Americans viewed one or more of Tina Fey's *SNL* parodies of Sarah Palin than the actual

Vice Presidential debate between Sarah Palin and Joe Biden (Irwin, 2008). As a further

testament to the changing media viewing experience, more Americans watched the

parody content online or through their DVRs than during the actual broadcasts (Irwin,

2008). In the end, we have come to care more about seeing the "important pieces" of

media content rather than full-length programs. As such, sites like YouTube, Hulu, and

even broadcast network web sites represent the media model of the present and near

future.

In a similar fashion, keeping up-to-date with celebrity political efforts has become

an important part of staying informed. For some, keeping up with celebrity fashion and

gossip has also meant keeping abreast of celebrity efforts on key national and

international political issues. For the celebrity, visible involvement in the national and

international political scene has become an important part of maintaining one's celebrity

status, while also offering a convenient way to distract fans and the media from focusing

on personal troubles or problematic box office numbers. Politicians continue to court

Hollywood celebrities, seeking contributions, endorsements, and campaign support. In

return, some celebrities have gained unprecedented access to the executive branch of government and have even been appointed to official positions within international governing organizations like the United Nations (Traub, 2008; Zeleny, 2009). For lay issue advocates and journalists looking to bring added attention to a given cause, celebrities have provided much needed support and visibility (Kristof, 2009; Meyer & Gamson, 1995). Finally, we've seen intensified efforts to package politicians as celebrities, as politicians and their handlers look to maintain and cultivate a positive and popularized public image. For instance, we see greater attention paid to Michelle Obama's appearances on magazine covers and her fashion choices than her contributions to public policy. In sum, we have come to favor a political environment that often puts style before substance.

Implications for Communication Research and Political Life

Studying this new mediated political experience has posed an interesting challenge for communication researchers used to measuring patterns of media consumption with traditional exposure or attention measures. With multiple comedy forms now available to viewers, simply measuring the frequency of exposure to cable and network late night comedy programs is no longer sufficient. Moreover, with young audience members favoring a clip driven or customized viewing experience, it is hard to truly capture what viewers are watching and/or paying attention to on a regular basis. As a field, we have yet to figure out the best way to differentiate between watching the same content on television vs. on network web sites or aggregator sites like Hulu.

Communication researchers will need to decide upon an efficient way to both measure exposure/attention and format of delivery simultaneously so that we can better understand whether and to what extent the way we now watch content has precipitated changes in our attitudes and behavior.

More broadly, the new mediated political experience has interesting implications for our political life, especially with respect to political campaigns and political engagement. Over the past few election cycles, we have seen prominent politicians rely on appearances on soft news and political comedy programs in particular to either kick-off or jump start their campaigns. Back in 2003, John Edwards announced his candidacy for president on an episode of *The Daily Show*. During this past election cycle, both Barack Obama and John McCain made appearances on *The Daily Show* and on network late-night comedy programs, while both John McCain and Sarah Palin made appearances on *Saturday Night Live* in the fall of 2008. Apart from offering a visible popular platform and a viewing audience that tends to be younger, female, more politically inattentive, and politically liberal, these soft news and political comedy programs offer candidates the opportunity to connect at length with the audience, talk in a more extended fashion, and focus on the personal rather than on the political and controversial (Baum, 2005; Moy, et al., 2006; Young, 2006). As the regular news cycle becomes more fragmented and sound bite driven, we may see candidates flock to these soft news and political entertainment programs with greater frequency. This trend could have interesting implications for the future of political campaigns as we could come to see an even greater shift to focus on the personal character and lives of politicians rather than their positions on the issues. We

may also find that having a good sense of humor could be as important a trait as being perceived as credible, trustworthy, and experienced. A successful candidate will need to be well-versed on domestic and foreign policy concerns and also be able to make a killer appearance on *Saturday Night Live*, succeeding as both a politician and a comic celebrity.

These changing media and political dynamics also open the door to greater celebrity involvement in political campaigns. The 2008 election cycle highlighted the importance of key endorsements (*e.g.,* Oprah Winfrey's endorsement of Barack Obama in May of 2007) and saw more celebrities participating in campaign events, GOTV appeals, and campaign media than ever before. While this involvement helped contribute to an Obama victory and has promoted higher voter turnout rates among young citizens new to the electorate, the added influx of celebrity involvement in political campaigns and even more broadly, political life, has raised interesting normative questions about the future of American politics. If celebrity involvement is one of the key factors driving youth involvement in politics, what does that say about the quality of youth civic and political engagement? How informed are these new voters, and how long will they actually remain involved and engaged in political and civic life? Will the act of voting turn these younger individuals into habitual voters or is celebrity involvement in political life diluting the political experience (Plutzer, 2002)?

Turning toward a discussion of celebrity involvement in issue politics, we again see great concern over the quality of youth civic and political engagement. If young people learn the facts about an issue from a celebrity like Angelina Jolie, how deep is their knowledge of an issue and how fleeting is their concern and interest in being

involved in the issue debate? At the same time, is exposure to celebrity issue advocacy efforts the hook needed to encourage greater involvement, learning, and political discussion? By relying on celebrities to bring issues to our attention, do we only begin to care about issues that are safe for celebrities to address (Meyer & Gamson, 1995)? How do social movements embrace the visibility and attention celebrities can bring to a campaign without diluting the message of the movement? More importantly, does celebrity involvement in politics promote a "temporary" politics, where we only care about issues when they are timely, good for publicity, and trendy? Finally, what happens when a celebrity has a "fall from grace," and their personal troubles overshadow their political involvement? Study 2 asked subjects to provide favorability ratings for a handful of celebrities in the pre-test questionnaire in an attempt to mask the reliance on Jolie as the celebrity advocate later in the study. One of the other celebrities included in the study was Tiger Woods. Back in October of 2009, Tiger Woods was simply seen as one of the country's best golfers and an active participant in our civic and political life. Just a couple of months later -- by December of 2009 -- Tiger Woods' personal life and extra-marital affairs were all the country could talk about, with companies like Accenture and Gatorade later dropping Tiger Woods as a spokesperson. Taking all of this into consideration, it will be important for future research to consider how the fleeting nature of celebrity popularity impacts our politics.

On the whole, it is unclear whether the new mediated political experience will promote an empowered or skeptical young audience. While recent work has suggested that watching programs like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* can actually have a

positive effect on evaluations of internal political efficacy, promote some forms of

political participation, and act as a gateway encouraging normally politically inattentive

individuals to tune into more traditional news content, we are still a long way from

understanding the true net impact of these programs (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Cao

& Brewer, 2008; Feldman & Young, 2008; Moy, Xenos, et al., 2005; Xenos & Becker,

2009). In addition, it is not clear whether celebrity involvement in issue politics can have

a lasting positive impact on youth civic and political engagement or whether exposure to

this type of political activity will promote a consumption based political culture, one that

extends beyond the increasingly popular practices of boycotting and buycotting (Zukin,

Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006). In sum, these changes in our mediated

political experience have interesting implications for the world of communication

research and the future of political campaigns and political engagement. At the same

time, it is clear that there is a great need for future research in this area in a continued

effort to understand how political entertainment is redefining our shared mass media and

political experience.

Questions for Future Research: Political Comedy

Going forward, there are a few key research problems I'd like to explore that run

parallel to this project. First, one trajectory of recent work on late night comedy programs

has started to focus on understanding how viewers process content, applying a discussion

of dual-processing models like ELM or HSM to experimental studies of comedy

exposure (Nabi, et al., 2007; Polk, et al., 2009; Young, 2008). While Nabi et al., (2007)

favor a message discounting approach, highlighting the motivation piece of the processing puzzle, work by Young (2008) and colleagues (Polk, et al., 2009) favors a counterargumentation or argument scrutiny approach, focusing more on the viewer's ability to process multiple forms of political comedy content. Despite these slight variations in study approach, both research efforts are concerned with understanding whether comedy content can be persuasive in both the short and long-term. One of the clear next steps for research on political comedy will be to expand studies of processing to understand the true persuasive impact of comedy content both irrespective and particular to comedy form. While there is a great deal of work assessing the effects of exposure to political comedy on key variables like learning, attitudes, efficacy, and participation, considerably less work has focused on persuasion. As such, work on persuasion needs to "catch up," to work on effects. I'd like to design future experimental studies to focus on the persuasion piece of the puzzle, assessing motivation, ability, and both short and long-term persuasive effects. Ideally, it would help to conduct experimental studies that favor a multiple phase study design so that persuasiveness can be tracked over time.

As discussed earlier, political parody, or an "imitation, intended to ridicule or to criticize" an original event or action is a popular comedic device used by the cast of *Saturday Night Live* and others to make fun of politicians (Kreuz & Roberts, 1993, p. 102). While an initial goal of this project was to also understand the differential impact of exposure to parody vs. real content on related political attitudes, the constraints of the study design and the final compiled experimental data set from Study 1 did not encourage

this type of analysis. I'd like to return to the study of political parody in future work,

cognizant of the fact that programs like *Saturday Night Live* continue their parody skits

all year round whether or not there is an election looming on the horizon. Thus, an

interesting study design could compare exposure to both high and low profile parody

content against high and low profile original content. For example, parodies of events

like the Sarah Palin/Katie Couric interview could be included in the same study along

with parodies of less prominent events like Scott Brown's introduction to the US Senate.

By featuring multiple conditions, a separate study might be able to really assess the net

impact of exposure to political parody on related political attitudes and other key metrics.

Eventually it would also be worthwhile to combine the study of political parody with the

study of other-directed and self-directed humor in order to better understand the

differential impacts of more than two comedy forms at once.

Calling themselves "America's Finest News Source," *The Onion* offers a weekly

satirical presentation of the news (Wenner, 2002). Traditionally a print newspaper, *The*

Onion has expanded its portfolio to include *The Onion News Network*, *The Onion Radio*

News, and *theOnion.com*. Taking advantage of this important comic vehicle, an

interesting future study could compare audience evaluations of news stories from *The*

Onion against evaluations of stories from more traditional news outlets like *The New*

York Times. Most of the work on political comedy has focused on measuring the effects

of exposure to video or television content. It would be interesting to see if changing the

format of delivery and relying on text stimuli as opposed to video content would yield

different findings. Having already gathered comparable news content on developments in

the Middle East from *The Onion* and *The New York* Times, it is safe to say that conducting an experiment on *The Onion* will be one of the first new studies I design and implement.

Questions for Future Research: Celebrity Politics

There is certainly less empirical work on the influence of celebrity politics, especially when compared to the body of research on the effects of exposure to political comedy. Study 2 offered a preliminary investigation of the net impact of exposure to celebrity issue politics, focusing on issue appropriateness, receptivity toward celebrity involvement in politics, issue engagement (*e.g.,* situational involvement, complacency, and apathy), and exposure to celebrity vs. expert issue appeals in both video and text format. As discussed earlier, Study 2 focused on one issue, the global refugee crisis, contrasting the testimony of celebrity advocate Angelina Jolie with that of Antonio Guterres, the official issue expert. An important next step will be to replicate pieces of Study 2 but focus on other issue debates, contrasting the testimony of new celebrity advocates and issue experts. A second follow-up study would also help to address the case-category confound mentioned earlier.

Individuals interested in keeping up-to-date on celebrity gossip and fashion can turn to multiple news outlets -- from fashion and human-interest magazines, to blogs like TMZ, Gawker, and Defamer, to major newspapers, and finally to entertainment news programs – in order to stay current. In other words, there is no shortage of celebrity news content available across multiple media formats and outlets. A new recent development is

the proliferation of blogs like JustJared, INFdaily, or CelebStyle that allow readers to learn about the latest celebrity fashions and click through photos to discover ways to mimic the look for themselves (C. C. Miller, 2010, February 21). These blogs allow readers to easily reach retail sites like J. Crew and French Connection that often times offer cheaper imitations of key fashion items. An interesting extension would be to see what would happen if readers were also given the option of learning a bit more about a celebrity's recent political or cause-related activity. Would readers simply focus on learning more about the clothing items or would they click through to learn more about a celebrity's politics, especially if they find the celebrity to be attractive, fashionable, and noteworthy? It would be interesting to design a study that pairs the ability to click through and learn more about celebrity fashion alongside the ability to learn more about a celebrity's political viewpoints and involvement in issue politics. Communication researchers could gain valuable insight into information seeking behaviors and further explore normative concerns about the quality of political and civic engagement that results from exposure to and reliance upon celebrity political statements and activity.

In sum, future research on celebrity politics can augment existing research on political entertainment, soft news, and political comedy. By continuing to study the persuasiveness, effects, and content of political comedy, we can get ever closer to a richer, more formal and theoretically grounded understanding of the changing dynamics of the new mediated political experience. By incorporating work on celebrity politics, communication researchers can extend the boundaries of political entertainment research,

fashioning a firmer grasp on how political entertainment is redefining our shared media and political experience.

Looking Ahead to 2012

As we look forward to the 2012 election, it is reasonable to expect to see some change in the political campaign media environment. While the 2008 Obama campaign was adept at grassroots campaigning, targeted Internet and video messaging, and had the backing of major celebrity advocates, the McCain campaign often lagged behind in their adoption of new media technologies and techniques. At the same time, McCain and Palin were more willing to make fun of themselves and their campaigns and connect with voters through appearances on programs like *Saturday Night Live*. This may in part be related to the fact that their campaign was consistently trailing the Obama-Biden campaign during the final weeks of the election cycle. Not surprisingly, celebrity support for these Republican candidates paled in comparison to the celebrity support---often unsolicited---for the Obama-Biden campaign.

In the immediate future, we should see the campaigns of both major parties better embrace the customized nature of our contemporary media experience. Visibility on the Internet, YouTube, and soft news programs will be all the more important, especially if these clips can spread virally with both great frequency and reach. We may see that the successful candidate is able to speak out on the issues, engage in comic performance, and connect themselves with the right Hollywood celebrities. Media personalities like Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart may exert greater, perhaps even unintended influence

on election outcomes, while Republican Party members may try to seek out or even develop right-leaning versions of these political comedy programs in order to fill the media vacuum. Given these changes in the campaign media environment, we may see greater political engagement among young people---the first-time voters who chose Obama in 2008 may again vote in 2012 and beyond---while another crop of first-time voters should make an effort to have their voices heard. At the same time, the mediated political experience of younger generations may differ greatly from the experience of their parents and grandparents who may still be primarily consuming more traditional campaign media efforts. Just as media events and the shared broadcast environment have become relics of the recent past, we may find that the uniform campaign media environment will be quickly replaced by the customized campaign experience.

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TABLES

Table 2.1

One-way ANOVA Analysis of Attitudes Toward John McCain

	df	F	η	p
	McCain Feeling Thermometer			
Total	(3, 397)	2.63	.020	.050
Democrats	(3, 174)	2.81	.046	.041
Republicans	(3, 150)	1.53	.030	.208

Table 2.2

Mean Attitudes Toward John McCain by Condition and Partisan Identification

| | McCain Feeling Thermometers | | | | | | | | |
| | Total | | | Democrat | | | Republican | | |
	Mean (S.D.)	Std. Error	n	Mean (S.D.)	Std. Error	n	Mean (S.D.)	Std. Error	n
SNL	57.46 (21.81)	2.23	96	41.79 (17.07)	2.73	39	73.40 (14.46)	2.29	40
Colbert	51.62 (25.69)	2.53	103	30.70 (21.80)	3.58	37	66.94 (19.27)	2.73	50
News	55.50 (24.32)	2.27	115	41.43 (20.89)	2.84	54	72.71 (19.00)	3.08	38
Ads	48.24 (25.93)	2.78	87	34.63 (22.70)	3.28	48	73.69 (13.12)	2.57	26
Total	53.40 (24.62)	1.23	402	37.44 (21.15)	1.59	178	71.18 (17.22)	1.39	154

Table 2.3

Hierarchical OLS Regression Predicting Attitudes Toward John McCain

	Zero-Order	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Block 1: Demographics					
Female	-.11*	-.13**	-.11*	-.08*	-.07
Age	-.09	-.11*	-.02	-.04	-.04
Incremental R^2 (%)		2.6%			
Block 2: Location					
Midwest	-.33***		-.34***	-.06	-.08
Incremental R^2 (%)			11.1%		
Block 3: Political predispositions					
Democrat	-.58***			-.32***	-.32***
Ideology (high=conservative)	.58***			.33***	.33***
Political Interest	.13**			-.04	-.05
Incremental R^2 (%)				27.0%	
Block 4: Treatment					
Saturday Night Live	.11*				-.03
Colbert	-.02				-.16***
Ads	-.11*				-.09*
Incremental R^2 (%)					2.2%
Total R^2 (%)					42.9%

Note 1: $N = 355$

Note 2: = Cell entries for all models are final standardized regression coefficients.

Note 3: $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

Table 2.4

Hierarchical OLS Regression Predicting Attitudes Toward John McCain with Interaction Effects

	Model 1	Model 2
Block 1: Direct Relationships		
Incremental R^2 (%)	42.9%***	
Block 2: Interaction Terms		
Democrat x SNL		.03
Ideology x SNL		-.04
Democrat x Colbert		-.03
Ideology x Colbert		-.00
Democrat x Ads		-.03
Ideology x Ads		-.03
Incremental R^2 (%)		0.7%
Total R^2 (%)		43.6%

Note 1: $N = 355$.

Note 2: Cell entries for all models are before-entry standardized regression coefficients for Block 2 and final standardized regression coefficients for Block 1.

Note 3: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3.1

Hierarchical OLS Regression Predicting Political Trust

	Zero-Order	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Block 1: Demographics							
Location	.05	.06	.07	.03	.04	.05	.02
Incremental R^2 (%)		0.3%					
Block 2: Demographics							
Female	.02		.02	.03	.05	.04	.04
Age	-.06		-.06	-.06	-.06	-.06	-.02
Incremental R^2 (%)			0.4%				
Block 3: Political Predispositions							
Party ID (high=Rep)	.00			.10	.10	.10	.11
Ideology (high=conservative)	-.04			-.09	-.09	-.08	-.07
Political Interest	-.11			-.09#	-.08	-.08	-.09#
Incremental R^2 (%)				1.1%			
Block 4: Media Use							
Network Comedy	.12**				.13*	.12*	.10*
Network News	-.03				-.09#	-.09#	-.08
Cable Comedy	.05				.01	.01	.01
Cable News					.04	.05	.00
Incremental R^2 (%)					1.9%		
Block 5: Political Humor							
Web sites (Onion, etc.)	.04					.01	.04
Saturday Night Live	.06					.04	.00
Incremental R^2 (%)						0.1%	
Block 6: Confidence in the Media							
Trust	.35***						.30***
Performance	.25***						.09#
Incremental R^2 (%)							12.0%
Total R^2 (%)							15.8%

Note 1: $N = 464$

Note 2: = Cell entries for all models are final standardized regression coefficients.

Note 3: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3.2

Hierarchical OLS Regression Predicting Internal Political Efficacy

	Zero-Order	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Block 1: Demographics							
Location	.04	.04	.04	.-.01	-.03	-.05	-.05
Incremental R^2 (%)		0.2%					
Block 2: Demographics							
Female	-.20***		-.20***	-.18***	-.11**	-.10*	-.10*
Age	.09*		.03	.03	.00	.01	.01
Incremental R^2 (%)			4.0%				
Block 3: Political Predispositions							
Party ID (high = Rep)	-.04			-.02	.01	.02	.01
Ideology (high=conservative)	-.04			-.01	-.04	-.06	-.06
Political Interest	-.21***			-.27***	-.23***	-.22***	-.21***
Incremental R^2 (%)				5.7%			
Block 4: Media Use							
Network Comedy	.12**				.00	.01	.00
Network News	.17***				.02	.03	.03
Cable Comedy	.24***				.10*	.10*	.09#
Cable News	.36***				.30***	.27***	.28***
Incremental R^2 (%)					11.2%		
Block 5: Political Humor							
Web sites (Onion, etc.)	.20***					.13**	.12**
Saturday Night Live	-.08					-.10*	-.09*
Incremental R^2 (%)						1.9%	
Block 6: Confidence in Public Institutions							
Media Trust	-.04						-.06
Media Performance	-.08						-.05
Government Trust	.06						.08#
Incremental R^2 (%)							1.0%
Total R^2 (%)							24.0%

Note 1: $N = 464$

Note 2: = Cell entries for all models are final standardized regression coefficients.

Note 3: *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 4.1

Mean Issue Importance and Appropriateness of Celebrity Involvement

Issue	Importance (1-5 scale)	Rank	Appropriate (1-7 scale)	Rank
	Mean (S.D.)		Mean (S.D.)	
Economy	4.23 (.73)	1	3.68 (1.77)	6
Health Care	3.95 (.91)	2	4.22 (1.70)	3
Environment	3.78 (.93)	3	N/A	N/A
Iraq	3.62 (.88)	4	4.21 (1.61)	4
Gay Marriage	3.21 (1.13)	5	4.80 (1.67)	2
Global Refugee Crisis	2.94 (.95)	6	4.96 (1.43)	1
Stem Cell Research	N/A	N/A	4.15 (1.60)	5

Table 4.2

One-way ANOVA Analysis of Receptivity Toward Celebrity Involvement in Issue Politics

by Condition

	df	*F*	η	*p*
	Receptivity Toward Celebrity Involvement			
Total	(4, 478)	4.76	.038	.001

Table 4.3

Mean Receptivity Toward Celebrity Involvement in Issue Politics by Condition

	Receptivity Toward Celebrity Issue Involvement		
	Mean	Standard Deviation	n
Celebrity Video	4.89	1.43	96
Expert Video	4.57	1.44	100
Celebrity Text	4.76	1.40	78
Expert Text	4.47	1.20	95
Control	4.13	1.33	114
Total	4.54	1.39	483

Table 4.4

Hierarchical OLS Regression Predicting Receptivity Toward Celebrity Political Involvement

	Zero-Order	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Block 1: Demographics						
Female	.12**	.12**	.10*	.09*	.10*	.10**
Age	-.07	-.07	-.06	-.05	-.04	-.04
Incremental R^2 (%)		1.9%				
Block 2: Political predispositions						
Party ID (Democrat)	.31***		.20***	.21***	.21***	.19***
Ideology (high = conservative)	-.30***		-.18***	-.16**	-.16**	-.17***
Political Interest	.02		-.01	-.02	-.02	-.01
Incremental R^2 (%)			11.7%			
Block 3: Political inputs						
Issue importance (refugee crisis)	.16***			.11*	.11*	.10*
Political knowledge	-.05			-.04	-.04	-.04
Political sophistication	-.01			-.03	-.03	-.03
Incremental R^2 (%)				1.4%		
Block 4: Media use						
Newspapers	-.05				-.08#	-.09#
Network TV News	-.02				-.01	-.01
Cable TV News	.00				.05	.03
Internet	.03				.04	.04
Incremental R^2 (%)					0.8%	
Block 5: Experimental Stimuli						
Celebrity Video	.13**					.19***
Expert Video	.01					.11*
Celebrity Text	.07					.13**
Expert Text	-.03					.08
Incremental R^2 (%)						2.6%
Total R^2 (%)						18.4%

Note 1: $N = 482$

Note 2: = Cell entries for all models are final standardized regression coefficients.

Note 3: $\#p < .10$, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

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Table 4.5

Hierarchical OLS Regression Predicting Internal Political Efficacy

	Zero-Order	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Block 1: Demographics						
Female	-.32***	-.32***	-.23***	-.20***	-.20***	-.20***
Age	.05	.03	-.02	-.04	-.04	-.04
Incremental R^2 (%)		10.6%				
Block 2: Political predispositions						
Party ID (Democrat)	.07		-.01	-.03	-.03	-.03
Ideology (high = conservative)	-.02		.02	.02	.02	.02
Political Interest	.61***		.57***	.45***	.37***	.37***
Incremental R^2 (%)			31.3%			
Block 3: Political inputs						
Issue importance (refugee crisis)	.18***			.06#	.06#	-.06#
Political knowledge	.36***			.13***	.13***	.13***
Political sophistication	.46***			.20***	.18***	.18***
Incremental R^2 (%)				5.8%		
Block 4: Media use						
Newspapers	.29***				.07*	.07*
Network TV News	.21***				.00	.00
Cable TV News	.26***				.05	.05
Internet	.44***				.08#	.08#
Incremental R^2 (%)					1.3%	
Block 5: Experimental Stimuli						
Celebrity Video	.03					-.04
Expert Video	.02					-.04
Celebrity Text	-.03					-.05
Expert Text	-.02					-.02
Incremental R^2 (%)						0.2%
Total R^2 (%)						49.2%

Note 1: $N = 482$

Note 2: = Cell entries for all models are final standardized regression coefficients.

Note 3: $\# p < .10$, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Table 5.1

Hierarchical OLS Regression Predicting Situational Involvement

	Zero-Order	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Block 1: Demographics							
Female	-.02	-.02	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03
Age	-.06	-.06	-.09*	-.09*	-.10*	-.09*	-.09*
Incremental R^2 (%)		0.4%					
Block 2: Political predispositions							
Party ID (Democrat)	.07		-.03	-.02	-.02	-.05	-.07
Ideology (high = conservative)	-.09*		-.08	.00	-.01	.00	-.01
Political Interest	.34***		.35***	.20***	.13**	.13**	.13**
Incremental R^2 (%)			12.6%				
Block 3: Political inputs							
Issue importance (refugee crisis)	.53***			.47***	.47***	.43***	.43***
Political knowledge	.11*			.04	.04	.04	.04
Political sophistication	.21***			.08#	.06	.07#	.07#
Incremental R^2 (%)				20.8%			
Block 4: Media use							
Newspapers	.15***				.03	.05	.05
Network TV News	.21***				.08#	.06	.07
Cable TV News	.19***				.03	.03	.03
Internet	.25***				.06	.05	.04
Incremental R^2 (%)					1.4%		
Block 5: Celebrity Orientation							
Favorability toward Jolie	.14***					.11**	.11**
Appropriateness of Issue	.29***					.16***	.16***
Receptivity	.16***					-.01	-.01
Incremental R^2 (%)						3.7%	
Block 6: Experimental Stimuli							
Celebrity Video	.02						-.02
Expert Video	.02						-.07
Celebrity Text	.07						-.04
Expert Text	-.10*						-.13**
Incremental R^2 (%)							1.3%
Total R^2 (%)							40.2%

Note 1: $N = 482$

Note 2: = Cell entries for all models are final standardized regression coefficients.

Note 3: # $p < .10$ * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 5.2

Hierarchical OLS Regression Predicting Complacency

	Zero-Order	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Block 1: Demographics							
Female	-.11*	-.11*	-.13**	-.11**	-.11*	-.10*	-.10*
Age	.04	.04	.05	.04	.04	.01	.02
Incremental R^2 (%)		1.5%					
Block 2: Political predispositions							
Party ID (Democrat)	-.13**		-.06	-.07	-.07	-.03	-.03
Ideology (high = conservative)	.13**		.09	.03	.03	.01	.01
Political Interest	-.11*		-.12*	-.04	-.04	-.02	-.02
Incremental R^2 (%)			3.3%				
Block 3: Political inputs							
Issue importance (ref. crisis)	-.35***			-.33***	-.32***	-.23***	-.23***
Political knowledge	.01			.01	.01	.02	.02
Political sophistication	-.03			.01	.01	.02	.02
Incremental R^2 (%)				9.7%			
Block 4: Media use							
Newspapers	-.02				.01	.01	.01
Network TV News	-.07				-.03	-.03	-.03
Cable TV News	-.05				-.01	.02	.02
Internet	-.05				-.01	.01	.01
Incremental R^2 (%)					0.1%		
Block 5: Celebrity Orientation							
Favorability toward Jolie	-.07					-.01	-.01
Appropriateness of Issue	-.23***					-.06	-.06
Receptivity	-.24***					-.18***	-.17***
Situational Involvement	-.33***					-.12*	-.12*
Incremental R^2 (%)						4.8%	
Block 6: Experimental Stimuli							
Celebrity Video	-.03						.01
Expert Video	-.09*						-.03
Celebrity Text	.04						.10*
Expert Text	.09						.08
Incremental R^2 (%)							1.7%
Total R^2 (%)							21.1%

Note 1: $N = 482$

Note 2: = Cell entries for all models are final standardized regression coefficients.

Note 3: # $p < .10$ *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 5.3

Hierarchical OLS Regression Predicting Issue Apathy

	Zero-Order	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Block 1: Demographics							
Female	-.03	-.03	-.06	-.07#	-.07	-.06	-.07
Age	.06	.06	.08#	.08#	.08#	.07	.08
Incremental R^2 (%)		0.5%					
Block 2: Political predispositions							
Party ID (Democrat)	-.13**		-.09#	-.09#	-.09#	-.09#	-.08
Ideology (high = conservative)	.07		.00	-.06	-.05	-.06	-.05
Political Interest	-.23***		-.23***	-.10***	-.10#	-.09	-.09
Incremental R^2 (%)			6.5%				
Block 3: Political inputs							
Issue importance (refugee crisis)	-.34***			-.30***	-.30***	-.23***	-.23***
Political knowledge	-.07			.01	.01	.01	.02
Political sophistication	-.22***			-.16***	-.16***	-.15***	-.16***
Incremental R^2 (%)				10.5%			
Block 4: Media use					-.01	-.01	-.01
Newspapers	-.09				.00	.01	.01
Network TV News	-.09				-.02	-.01	.01
Cable TV News	-.09*				.02	.03	.03
Internet	-.13***						
Incremental R^2 (%)					0.1%		
Block 5: Celebrity Orientation							
Favorability toward Jolie	-.07					-.04	-.04
Appropriateness of Issue	-.14**					.00	.01
Receptivity	-.11*					-.03	-.04
Situational Involvement	-.33***					-.15**	-.14**
Incremental R^2 (%)						1.9%	
Block 6: Experimental Stimuli							
Celebrity Video	.02						.05
Expert Video	-.12*						-.05
Celebrity Text	-.02						.04
Expert Text	.11*						.09#
Incremental R^2 (%)							1.6%
Total R^2 (%)							21.1%

Note 1: *N* = 482

Note 2: = Cell entries for all models are final standardized regression coefficients.

Note 3: # *p* < .10**p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Table 5.4

Hierarchical OLS Regressions for Situational Involvement and Apathy with Interactions

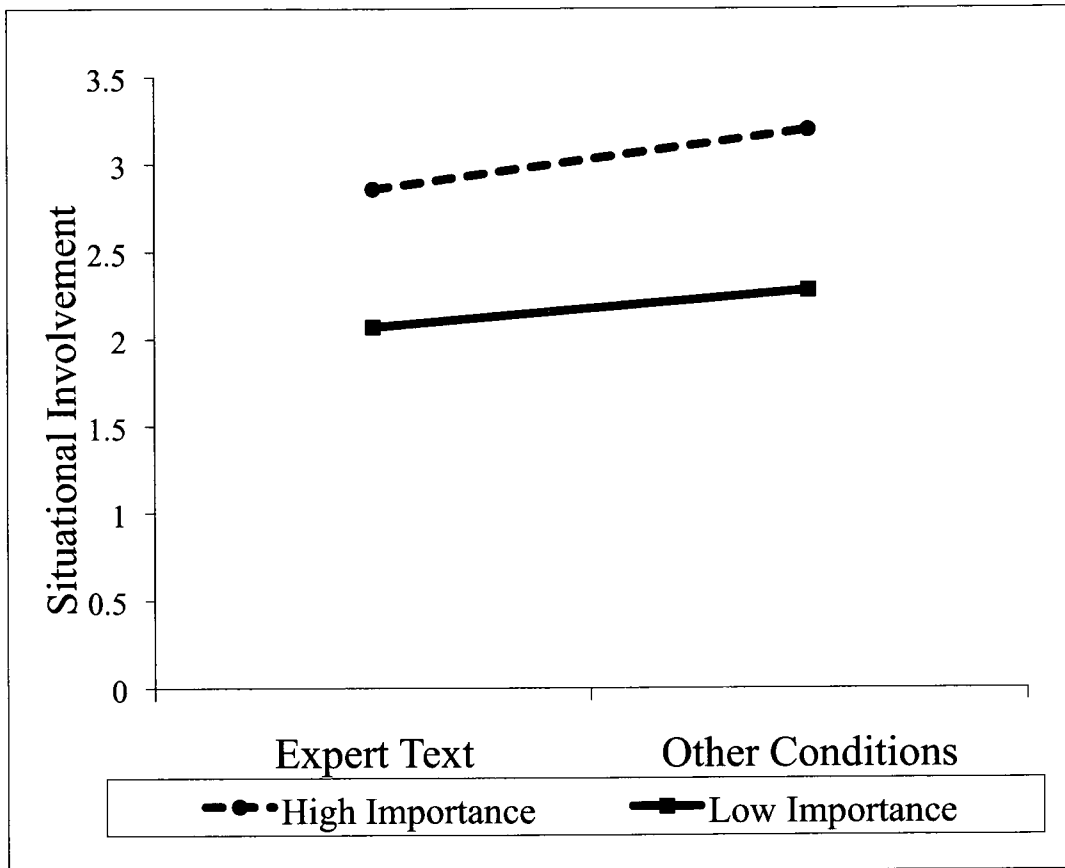|	Situational Involvement		Apathy	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Block 1: Direct Relationships				
Incremental R^2 (%)	40.2%		21.1%	
Block 2: Issue Importance and Favorability terms				
Issue Importance x Celebrity Video		-.02		-.12**
Issue Importance x Celebrity Text		.03		.04
Issue Importance x Expert Video		.01		-.01
Issue Importance x Expert Text		-.08*		.03
Favorability x Celebrity Video		.04		.14***
Favorability x Celebrity Text		.01		-.01
Favorability x Expert Video		-.07#		.01
Favorability x Expert Text		-.01		-.06
Incremental R^2 (%)		1.3%		3.4%
Total R^2 (%)		41.5%		24.5%

Note 1: $N = 482$

Note 2: = Cell entries for Model 2 are before-entry standardized regression coefficients.

Note 3: # $p < .10$ *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.
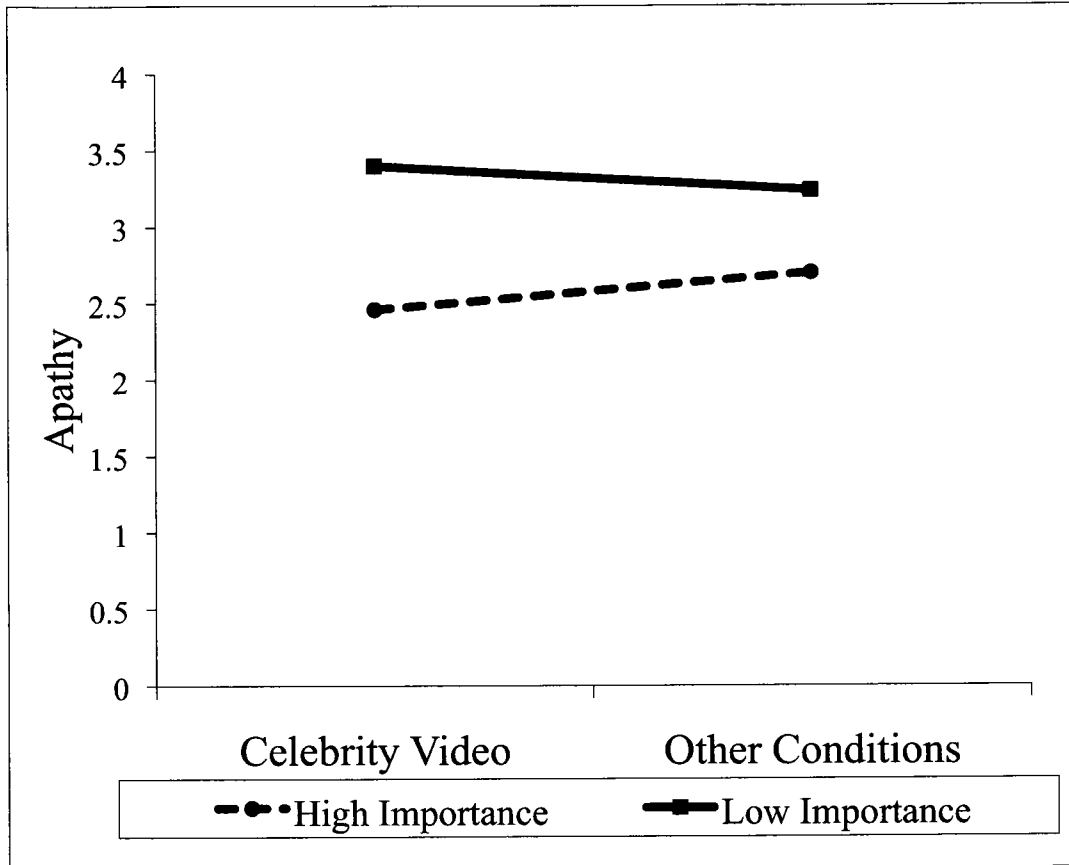
FIGURES

Figure 5.1

Expert Text, Issue Importance, and Situational Involvement

Note: Full scale not shown for situational involvement. Responses reflected mean agreement with five related statements on a 7-point scale (1= "strongly disagree," to 7 = "strongly agree"). Importance variable split into low importance (1-3 on 5-point importance scale) and high importance (4-5 on 5-point importance scale). Importance scale had labels of 1 = "not at all important," 5 = "extremely important."
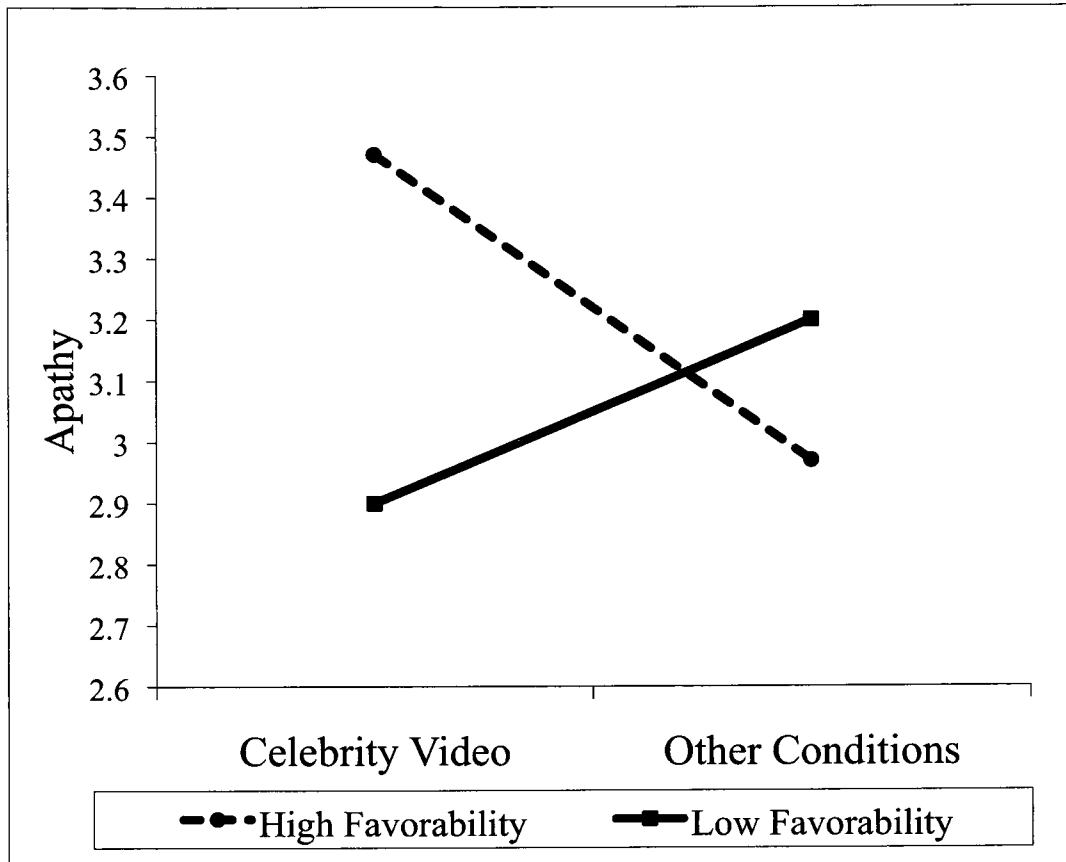
Figure 5.2

Celebrity Video, Issue Importance, and Apathy

Note: Full scale not shown for apathy. Responses reflected mean agreement with two correlated statements ($r = .70$, $p < .001$) measured on a 7-point scale (1= "strongly disagree," to 7 = "strongly agree,"). Importance variable split into low importance (1-3 on 5-point importance scale) and high importance (4-5 on 5-point importance scale). Importance scale had labels of 1 = "not at all important," 5 = "extremely important."

Figure 5.3

Celebrity Video, Favorability Toward Jolie, and Apathy

Note: Full scale not shown for apathy. Responses reflected mean agreement with two correlated statements ($r = .70$, $p < .001$) measured on a 7-point scale (1= "strongly disagree," to 7 = "strongly agree"). Favorability toward Jolie variable split into low favorability (response of 1 or 2 on 4-point favorability scale) and high favorability (response of 3 or 4 on 4-point favorability scale). Favorability scale had labels of 1 = "very unfavorable," 4 = "very favorable."