

THESIS

PERSPECTIVE BY INCONGRUITY OR CYNICISM?

AN ANALYSIS OF REDACTION AND FRAMING IN *THE DAILY SHOW WITH JON*

STEWART'S "ARMADEBTON 2011"

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

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Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2012

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ABSTRACT

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At the 2006 National Communication Association convention, Rod Hart and Johanna Hartelius presented a paper in which they charged Jon Stewart with sins against democracy. The transcript of the "trial," including arguments in defense of Stewart that were provided by Lance Bennet and Rob Hariman, was published in a 2007 critical forum in *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. This thesis extends that conversation to consider whether *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*'s redaction strategies and framing practices may improve or undermine audiences' political engagement. First, through rhetorical analysis, this thesis shows how *The Daily Show*'s use of redaction potentially strengthens the conditions for democracy by performing a watchdog role and diversifying political discourses in the public sphere. Conversely, through framing analysis, this thesis reveals that the pervasiveness of strategy framing on *The Daily Show* may contribute to cynical interpretations of political life and therefore decrease political engagement among audiences. Finally, this thesis points to areas for future research into issues surrounding media and democracy and argues for the advancement of a more deliberative model for political news that would increase audiences' perceived political efficacy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many teachers without whom I could not have completed this thesis. First, I would like to thank Dr. Karyl Sabbath for sparking my interest in the field of communication studies and for encouraging me to pursue a graduate degree. I would also like to thank Dr. Scott Diffrient, Dr. Leah Sprain, and Dr. Donna Rouner for their suggestions in earlier stages of this research. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Dawn Mallette, Dr. Jon Lupo, and Dr. Martín Carcasson, for their support and guidance. Dr. Mallette, your kindness and positive feedback were greatly appreciated. Dr. Lupo, your input helped me to accomplish more in this research than I could have imagined on my own, and your instruction in media studies was an important component of my success. Finally, to my advisor, Dr. Carcasson, your wisdom and your patience throughout this process have been invaluable. Your advice always pointed me in a useful direction, and your work is an inspiration for those of us seeking to ground our communication research in social relevance.

Additionally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support and encouragement. I would especially like to thank Patrick St. Clair, whose selflessness and willingness to listen to me talk through this thesis many, many times has made my success possible.

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I: Introduction

Unprecedented levels of ideological extremism exist in national politics (Gastil 2008), and no case better demonstrates today's ideological rigidity than the 2011 congressional debt ceiling negotiation. A May 22, 2012 CNN report by Jeanne Sahadi recalled that

The debt ceiling showdown of 2011 . . . created a lot of bad blood between the parties . . . [and] sparked the first-ever downgrade of the U.S. credit rating by Standard and Poor's, which cited political brinkmanship as the chief cause . . . [and] in turn caused one of the most volatile weeks in world markets and left Americans and investors with the sense that Congress can't handle even the most elemental tasks without a lot of destructive drama.

In the aftermath of the contentious debt ceiling debate, public approval ratings for Congress plummeted. A 2012 ABC News report by Gary Langer declared that the divisive debt negotiations "led Congress off the approval cliff" to all-time low approval ratings by the end of 2011.

The ideologically rigid practices demonstrated in national politics may be the primary reason for the American public's disapproval of Congress, but the public's opinion is potentially complicated by a media culture that thrives off of adversarial political debate. Capella and Jamieson (1997) describe the public's cynicism about politics as an epidemic exacerbated by exposure to political news coverage. Indeed, most of the public's exposure to politics is mediated, rather than face-to-face; therefore, in order to achieve a clearer understanding of individuals' political attitudes and engagement in activities associated with citizenship, it is important to consider how media producers portray political processes to media audiences.

In cases like the 2011 debt ceiling negotiations, the application of communication theory is useful for clarifying the media system's relationship to politics. Communication literature provides an extensive body of research dedicated to studying the production and potential social consequences of political news media. Communication researchers traditionally acknowledge

the news media's importance in democracy for disseminating political information to publics (Aalberg, van Aelst, and Curran 2010) and performing a watchdog role (Trappel and Maniglio 2009), yet many communication scholars question contemporary news media systems' actual democratic value given mainstream media's commercialization (e.g., Habermas 2006; Bohman 2007; Gastil 2008).

Communication researchers use both rhetorical analysis and media effects models for exploring how and what political news texts may contribute to political understanding and engagement among media audiences. Rhetorical theory's application informs the analysis of rhetorical strategies and political arguments and their possible social implications (Zarefsky 2010), and although the field of rhetorical criticism traditionally analyzed political speeches, it can also be applied to the analysis of media texts (Root 1987). Media theory's application assists in the exploration of both the production and potential effects of political news messages. Many media effects theorists suggest that how media portray politics influences audiences' understandings of political processes and public issues (Capella and Jamieson 1997; Kitzinger 2009) and therefore may enrich or subvert the public's engagement with a political issue depending upon the type of coverage it receives in news media. This research will perform rhetorical and framing analyses of a nontraditional political news media source's coverage of the debt ceiling vote in order to better understand its potential implications.

Analyzing traditional political news programming is a conventional approach to studying media's relationship with politics, but today's rapidly expanding media environment makes an evaluation of mass media's capacity to inform, facilitate, and/or encourage audiences' engagement in politics increasingly complex. Since one development in today's expanding television environment is satiric coverage of politics on "fake news" programs, many researchers

have turned their attention to satiric political news programs to explore the potential contributions they make to the political news environment (e.g., Baym 2005; Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Bennet 2007; Gray, Jones, and Thompson 2009; Jones 2010; Jones and Baym 2010; Painter and Hodges 2010). This research extends the investigation of satiric news coverage's contribution to the political news environment with an examination of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's (TDS)* satiric coverage of the 2011 congressional debt ceiling debate and an exploration of its potential impact on the public's attitudes toward and engagement in politics. This research seeks an understanding of how and what *TDS* contributes to the political environment.

Chapter Layout

The chapters in this study are as follows: Chapter one is the introduction, which includes a justification for the study of *TDS*, the research questions this study poses, a review of relevant literature, and a description of the methods used in the analyses of *TDS*. Chapter two is a rhetorical analysis of *TDS's* redaction strategies for satiric critique of the political communication surrounding the debt ceiling negotiations. Chapter two includes a discussion of satire and its potential contribution to politics as well as a discussion of the specific redaction strategies that facilitate *TDS's* performance of satiric critique. Chapter three is a framing analysis of *TDS's* coverage of the debt ceiling vote, and it examines the framing practices *TDS* engaged in its satiric critique of the debt ceiling negotiations and considers their potential implications for political engagement among members of the public. Finally, chapter four summarizes the findings of my research, discusses *TDS's* complex role in today's ideologically extreme and mediated political culture, and offers suggestions for future research.

Justification for Study of *TDS*

A primary reason that *TDS* warrants attention is simply its popularity as a mass media text. Originally created by Lizz Winstead and Madeline Smithberg in 1996 and hosted by Craig Kilborn until Jon Stewart took over in 1999, *TDS*'s audience has more than doubled since Stewart's arrival. According to David Ferguson (2011), *TDS* averaged 2.3 million viewers per night at the time of the debt ceiling debate. The show previously reached a record high rating of 3 million viewers in a 2008 interview with then-presidential-candidate Barack Obama (Jones 2010).

Additionally, *TDS* has received critical acclaim. The show has been awarded eight Emmys for the Outstanding Variety, Music, or Comedy Series category and seven Emmys for the Outstanding Writing for a Variety, Music, or Comedy Program category (Emmys.com). The show also won two Peabody Awards and numerous recognitions from the Television Critics Association and the Writers Guild of America (The Daily Show.com). In 2007, Poniewozik named *TDS* on *TIME Entertainment*'s "All-Time 100 TV Shows," arguing that "Stewart and company have found the B.S. detector that stenographic media outlets seem to have thrown in the trash, cleaned it off, souped it up, and cranked up its sensitivity to 11."

TDS further warrants attention because of its interaction with broader political discourses and media systems. Though Stewart has never indicated that he would run for a political office, on occasion he has entered into the sphere of political activism. Two recent examples are his 2010 Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear hosted with Stephen Colbert and his brief management of the Colbert Super PAC. In addition to occasional flirtations with public political activism, *TDS*'s interaction with wider media discourses has been noteworthy. At least two instances of *TDS*'s interaction with the broader news media system have warranted attention in

communication literature. First, in 2004, Stewart appeared as a guest on *Crossfire* and charged the hosts with practicing “partisan hackery” rather than fulfilling a “responsibility to the public discourse” (as cited in Gastil 2008, 45). Within three months of Stewart’s appearance, CNN cancelled *Crossfire*. When asked why, CNN Chief Executive Jonathan Klein said, “I guess I come down more firmly in the Jon Stewart camp” (as cited in Gastil 2008, 46).

Second, after the 2008 downturn of the American economy in an interview with Jim Cramer, CNBC’s host of the financial advising program *Mad Money*, Stewart performed what Jones (2010) calls “another cultural touchstone of popular critique against the news media” on par with his *Crossfire* appearance (117). In the exchange, Stewart detailed the ways in which Cramer failed to adequately investigate banking practices prior to the 2008 housing foreclosure crisis while offering imprudent financial advice that ultimately harmed the general public and made Wall Street wealthier. Stewart persistently reiterated Cramer’s responsibility as a member of the press to perform a watchdog role on behalf of the public. He insisted that Cramer’s job was to interrogate rather than comply with discourses that circulated among elite actors seeking continued public support for irresponsible investment practices. The interview concluded with Cramer’s promise to return to the fundamentals of reporting for the good of the public so that Stewart can go “go back to making fart noises and funny faces” (as cited in Jones 2010, 136-140). The above are just two examples illustrating the argument that “You simply can’t understand American politics in the new millennium without *The Daily Show*” (Moyers, *Bill Moyers Journal*, PBS, July 11, 2003). Now that *TDS*’s social significance has been established, the following section will situate this analysis of the text within the field of communication research.

Literature Review

This literature review draws from political communication and media effects scholarship in an effort to integrate knowledge from both fields of research into this analysis of *TDS*. Specifically, this review will include discussion of literature from rhetorical, deliberative, and framing effects research as well as a discussion of the extant communication literature debating *TDS*'s potential impact on American democracy. This literature review will reveal that reasonable arguments exist in political communication theory for why *TDS* may benefit democracy as a watchdog of the press and politicians. However, it will also show that media effects research provides evidence suggesting that the structure of the political news media system, including *TDS*'s brand of "fake" news, may inherently undermine democracy by heightening the public's distrust of political actors and governmental institutions.

***TDS* and the Public Sphere**

Habermas's (1989) description of the public sphere conceptualizes a discursive space for democracy and offers scholars terminology for discussing the public's political engagement. According to Habermas, the public, publicity, and public opinion are the essential elements of the public sphere. Habermas defines the public as private individuals congregating to rationally-critically debate decisive sociopolitical questions. Publicity is the process of exposing state policy to the criticism of the public (Habermas 1989). Finally, public opinion is the product of public discourse, and it functions to exert political influence on the state (Habermas 1989).

Habermas published his seminal discussion of the public sphere in Germany in 1962, long before television news media's explosion. His theoretical account of the public sphere therefore could not predict the advent of satiric, "fake" political television news programs like *TDS*. Nonetheless, studies of *TDS* are concerned with the show's impact on the conditions of the

discursive spaces in which the public is politically engaged and thus rely upon, revise, and revive Habermas's discussion of the public sphere. This research, for example, is concerned with whether or not *TDS* produces messages that potentially inform and/or encourage audiences' political engagement in the public sphere.

A growing branch of political communication scholars expand upon the theoretical basis that public sphere theory provides to advance a deliberative model for political communication, which emphasizes the importance of engaging citizens in issues and problem-solving processes (Carcasson and Sprain 2010). Gastil (2008) defines deliberation as careful examination of a problem which leads to a well-reasoned solution "after a period of inclusive, respectful consideration of diverse points of view" (8). Gastil identifies five analytical steps in the deliberative process. The first step in deliberation is to create a solid information base which considers the complexities of a social problem or political issue. Second, various stakeholders and the key values associated with their positions are identified. Third, the broadest possible range of potential solutions are identified, and, fourth, their advantages, disadvantages, and trade-offs are weighed. Finally, the result of deliberation will vary. If group members are in a position to make a decision, then the fifth step of deliberation is group members selecting and recommending the solution that they agree is best. On the other hand, if the group members are not positioned to make a decision, then the result of deliberation will be each participant's recognition and understanding of his or her own position or stake regarding the issue.

Deliberation is important for improving the quality of democracy, because "the more often a system deliberates, the more readily it can meet the criteria for the democratic process" (Gastil 2008, 8). Gastil (2008) posits three criteria for determining the degree to which a governing system operates democratically: inclusion, effective participation, and enlightened

understanding. Inclusion consists of recognizing the votes of all adult members of a democracy. Effective participation consists of enabling members of a democracy to take part in setting the political agenda. Finally, enlightened understanding refers to the opportunity to “work through” issues so that constituents consider how and why issues affect varying stakeholders in differing ways.

Page (1996) points out that “in modern societies . . . deliberation is (and probably must be) largely mediated, with professional communicators rather than ordinary citizens talking to each other and to the public through mass media communications” (1). Media can contribute to better public deliberation and therefore improve the conditions for democracy by fulfilling the analytical processes of deliberation outlined by Gastil (2008). First, in order to create a solid information base, Gastil suggests that media producers must provide in-depth reports of issues and events. Second, in order to prioritize the key values at stake, media producers must “explore the underlying public concerns behind the surface facts” (Gastil 2008, 52). Third, media producers must report a variety of proposed and possible solutions, including unpopular ones. Fourth, in order to weigh the tradeoffs among solutions, media producers should scrutinize, rather than merely juxtapose, varying viewpoints. Finally, in order to enable the best decision-making possible, media producers should make recommendations, but leave the media user the freedom to form his or her own opinion on the issue.

Gastil (2008) discusses three specific media practices which he believes could contribute to the deliberative quality of the media landscape: public journalism, watchdogs and blogs, and microjournalism. Public journalism is also known as civic journalism, and it is a movement to promote deliberation through journalism. Practitioners of public journalism seek to improve the quality of public conversations, and they gather and report the news in a manner designed to

facilitate better democracy. Watchdogs and bloggers play an important role holding the news media accountable for inaccuracies and exposing the abuse of power, which is especially germane in the absence of an American press council. In fact, some scholars suggest that *TDS* performs a useful, although unconventional, watchdog role in the public sphere (Jones 2010; Painter and Hodges 2010). Microjournalism is the practice of reporting local news for neighborhoods and small communities in order to strengthen community members' identification and cooperation with one another.

Habermas (2006) proposes two further critical conditions upon which the media's capacity to participate in the process of deliberation relies. The first condition is that the media system must achieve "independence from its social environments" (Habermas 2006, 411). This means that the news media should regulate itself and maintain a distinct separation from governing bodies. Related to that, the media has the responsibility to provide its audience with alternatives to the perspective(s) of the state. The media's second critical condition for facilitation of public deliberation is consultation with feedback from civil society. Habermas pinpoints two obstacles to the ideal feedback system. First, social status and culture tend to determine participation in the political public sphere, indicating "insufficient functional differentiation of the political public sphere from the class structure of civil society" (Habermas 2006, 421). Secondly, "the colonization of the public sphere by market imperatives leads to a peculiar paralysis of civil society" in which, as the news grows more highly commercialized, it causes the "alienation of citizens from politics" (Habermas 2006, 422). Political alienation results from mass media systems treating their audiences as consumers rather than as citizens. Possible sociopolitical implications of this are continued underrepresentation of underserved

demographics in the political public sphere and increased audience disengagement from activities associated with citizenship.

In summary, Habermas's (1989) public sphere theory provides the basis for the model of deliberative democracy. The media's potential to contribute to political engagement among citizens is an ideal expressed among some deliberative scholars. The following discussion turns to a debate in the field of communication research over whether *TDS*'s political satire functions to improve conditions for or, conversely, decrease the possibility of citizens' political engagement.

Varying interpretations of *TDS*.

Press members, media critics, and communication scholars offer ranging perspectives regarding whether *TDS*'s satiric critique of politics improves or weakens conditions for political engagement. Central to the debate is whether *TDS* potentially strengthens democracy by performing a daily, comic critique of politicians and the press that holds them accountable to the public's scrutiny, or potentially weakens democracy by generating greater public cynicism regarding politics, thus decreasing political participation. For instance, while Baym (2009) argues that *TDS* may be useful for sparking expectations for better political communication and higher quality journalism, Hart and Hartelius (2007) accuse Stewart of "leading the Children of Democracy astray . . . [and] plant[ing] in them a false knowledge, a trendy awareness" (263). The following discussion elaborates upon these varying and sometimes competing perspectives regarding *TDS*'s contribution to the public sphere.

For some who argue that *TDS*'s critique of politics and political news is valuable to democracy, the show resonates with their own sense of frustration with the current political news environment. A fan of the show and Syracuse University's Chair of the Communications

Department, Hub Brown, says, “There are days when I watch *The Daily Show*, and I kind of chuckle. There are days when I laugh out loud. There are days when I stand up and point to the TV and say ‘You’re damn right!’” (Smolkin 2007, 19). Others in the field of communication scholarship express similarly positive responses to *TDS*. Baym (2007) argues that *TDS*’s criticism compensates for a deficiency among members of the mainstream television news media, who exhibit “disinterest in critical inquiry in an age of corporate commodification” (111), by interrogating power and critiquing the political news environment. Likewise, Waisanen (2009) describes Stewart’s work on *TDS* as a kind of rhetorical critique; although operating outside of the academic setting, it is unmistakably concerned with “analyzing and evaluating communication issues like fallacies, generalities, important omissions, and how communication should ideally take place between interlocutors” (136). Researchers have even argued that Stewart’s work on *TDS* demonstrates deliberation. For example, Baym (2005) says that the show “uses techniques drawn from genres of news, comedy, and television talk to revive a journalism of critical inquiry and advance a model of deliberative democracy” (259). Baym’s argument implies that *TDS* can, in fact, function as both a watchdog and a contributor to public deliberation.

Painter and Hodges (2010) claim that *TDS*’s satire performs a necessary critique of the press that benefits democracy by “holding those who claim they *are* practicing journalism accountable to the public they claim to serve” (259; emphasis in original). Although Painter and Hodges acknowledge political satire’s potential negative consequences, such as demeaning the journalistic profession and promoting distrust of the political system, they insist that Stewart’s role as a critic positively impacts the quality of journalism in three broad ways. First, Stewart holds media pundits accountable to the public. There are four specific ways in which *TDS* holds

the press accountable to the public: illuminating falsehoods reported by members of the traditional news media, reporting on conflicts between special interests and the public good, highlighting the media's exaggeration of inconsequential news stories, and critiquing "the very nature" of the traditional news, such as the marketing strategies it employs (270). Second, Stewart serves to remind viewers of journalism's ideal standards. He accomplishes this by passing judgment when there is evidence that the press has failed to meet its obligation to the public. Third, he makes his audience more media literate by revealing how stories are captured and presented through editing. In each of these three ways, *TDS* performs a useful service for the public.

Painter and Hodges (2010) additionally emphasize the need for a national American press council composed of professional journalists and laypeople informed of the purpose and importance of the press in democratic society. In the absence of such an organization, they argue that press criticisms such as those performed by Stewart play a necessary role. They conclude that "while Stewart has chosen to make his points through laughter, he does not bother to hide the serious import of what he says: News journalism could do better to support the democratic system that has given it such life" (273). In other words, *TDS* holds the press accountable to democratic ideals similar to those espoused by Habermas (1989, 2006) and Gastil (2008).

Hariman (2007) contests the charge that *TDS* makes cynicism trendy. He argues that *TDS*'s critics are mistaken if they conflate the show's satire with political cynicism, and he cites evidence from the National Annenberg Election Survey conducted in 2004 that shows that *TDS* viewers tend to be politically informed individuals, not disengaged cynics. The Annenberg survey shows that *TDS* viewers between eighteen and twenty-nine years of age are more likely than their non-viewing peers to demonstrate campaign and candidate knowledge, regardless of

numerous potential intervening variables including level of education, political affiliation, gender, and ranging news consumption and sources. Hariman further argues that comedy is necessary in politics today because it affords audiences an opportunity to confront the absurdity of politics and move on to the pressing choices that demand the public's attention.

Jones (2010) argues that "Critics of entertainment television have propagated a myth based on dubious evidence that late-night comedy television programming is a central location for the delivery of news . . . for young people" (170), and he cites a 2007 PEW study showing that *TDS* viewers are among the most informed about political candidates, campaign issues, and current events. Bennet (2007) similarly repudiates the assertion that Stewart contributes to political cynicism any more than does the "real" news and/or political practice. It is problematic, according to Bennet, to suggest that comedians are responsible for cynicism when, in fact, the political climate is the cause of the public's cynicism. To be cynical in an already cynical political environment is no crime, nor should it come as any surprise to press members, politicians, and researchers. Although Hariman, Jones, and Bennet are concerned with the public's political engagement, they each contend that an alarmist response to the growing popularity of *TDS* (and its offshoot *The Colbert Report*) is unfounded.

Jones (2010) makes the case that the current state of politics is the public's primary motivation for consuming political satire like *TDS*. He argues that political satire's growing popularity indicates that the public is looking for a distinctly different type of political discourse than that which is offered in the conventional political news environment. Moreover, *TDS*'s democratic value lies in the fact that *TDS* challenges the traditional news media's authority in determining how the news and reality are presented to the public. Jones argues that "fake" news and satire might contain more reality than some so-called "real" news, and its rising popularity

may indicate the ushering in of a new era of political news coverage that rejects the current “real” news model.

One of *TDS*'s primary modes of critique occurs through an editing technique called *redaction* (Jones 2010). Redaction is a type of editing through which *TDS* compiles and reappropriates news footage from various sources to create its own satiric news report. According to Jones (2010), redaction enables *TDS* to create “new” news when paired with Stewart performing one of the following four prosecutorial roles: *interrogating multiple witnesses*, *cross-examining the defendant*, *summarizing evidence*, and *delivering the closing statement*. The first, *interrogating multiple witnesses*, arranges multiple news segments featuring multiple political players in dialogue with one another to build *TDS*'s case. Second, *cross-examining the defendant* deploys multiple news clips featuring a single political actor across time to reveal that political actor's self-indictment. Third, *summarizing evidence* sets up and contextualizes *TDS*'s argument with edited footage from various sources. Fourth, *the closing statement*, is a “mash-up of video segments that creatively and artistically says something new in ways that are humorous yet conclusive” (Jones 2010, 117). Jones's typology of four redaction techniques will be central to the following study of *TDS*'s satiric critique of the strategic communication surrounding the 2011 debt ceiling debate. The first research question this thesis poses is the following:

RQ 1: How do redaction strategies function rhetorically in *TDS*'s satiric critique of politics?

In contrast to the positive reviews *TDS* earns among some press members and scholars, others in the field contend that by making news into a joke *TDS* potentially discourages viewers from taking the news seriously or, worse, leads viewers to distrust the press, politicians, and

political processes. Of particular concern for many of *TDS*'s critics is the show's youthful audience. Ed Fouhy, a former employee of all three of the major broadcast networks in his twenty-two year career as a producer, argues that "when you begin to blur the line . . . [in order] to attract more viewers and younger viewers, I think that's a lousy idea" (Smolkin 2007, 20). Echoing Fouhy's concerns, Baumgartner and Morris (2006) termed the cynicism they observed among youth in their study "*The Daily Show* effect." Baumgartner and Morris suggest that when young adults watch *TDS* they are more likely to exhibit cynical attitudes about political candidates, political institutions, and the news media. Expressing similar concern for *TDS*'s detrimental effect on youth, Masciotra (2011) argues in *Pop Matters*,

The majority of Stewart's acolytes are under the age of thirty, and through nightly viewing of *The Daily Show*, they are able to find their hero—a man who, with only one or two exceptions, will insist he is merely a comedian when pressed to answer any questions about his politics, agenda, or purpose.

Masciotra points out that political satire is not the equivalent of political action, nor does it necessarily lead to any further political engagement among its audience.

Related to Masciotra's (2011) argument is the concern that *TDS* makes political cynicism trendy among its audience. Hart and Hartelius (2007), like Masciotra, argue that Stewart frequently dodges accountability by stating that *TDS*'s intention is to entertain, rather than inform. They call Stewart a "multi-mediated reincarnation of the classical Cynic" (264), and they allege that cynicism's appeal for youth is its oversimplification and generalization of the political process. Further, they assert that Stewart's viewpoint is an elitist one that assumes the public is made up of uninformed people who are disengaged and incapable of organizing publically to generate influence. Hart and Hartelius advocate for the value of skepticism as an alternative to cynicism. They say that skepticism is hallmarked by the following five canons: 1) appearances are sometimes misleading, 2) deep reflection is better than impulsiveness, 3) conventional

wisdom is rarely wise, 4) a single person should never be the sole trusted source of information, and 5) “because most data are mediated, primary (not secondary) sensation should be prized” (271). Skepticism, according to Hart and Hartelius, is the path to enlightened political practice.

Finally, Hart and Hartelius (2007) identify diatribe and chreia as the tools of the ancient Greek Cynic that Stewart commonly enlists. Diatribe works by presenting an ideologically-driven argument that Windt (1972) says is “an attempt to criticize, to entertain, to shock and to convey impressions of public figures” (7). Diatribe also mocks the audience. Hart and Hartelius argue that diatribe is demonstrated especially well in Stewart’s book, *America, (The Book)*; however, they do not elaborate upon their argument with examples from the show. They describe chreia as a trope “characterized by black humor, paradox or surprise, and ethical seriousness” (265). According to Hart and Hartelius, the chreia is integral to Stewart’s performance, and although it makes Stewart’s mockery artful, it does not encourage active citizenship; rather, it encourages political cynicism. Although Hart and Hartelius’s study provides no empirical evidence supporting their assertion that the cynic’s rhetorical tropes will lead to cynical learning, media effects research does provide a basis for the relationship between political news coverage and audiences’ political engagement. Therefore, the following discussion will turn to the relationship between political news and citizens’ engagement.

Media Framing and Political Engagement

Debates among scholars regarding whether there are emotional, behavioral, and/or cognitive effects related to media consumption have a long history in the field of communication research, and media effects theories are based upon the premise that audiences learn from media consumption (Kitzinger 2009). Media effects theorists have found evidence that the news media’s agenda influences the public’s agenda by determining which issues the public is aware

of and which political issues are considered important (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Iyengar 1987; Dearing and Rogers 1996; Shaw and McCombs 1977). Related to that, theories of framing effects suggest that the news frames utilized by the press call attention to particular aspects of news reports and, consequently, direct and potentially constrain audiences' interpretations of reported events and issues. For example, Gamson's (1992) explanation of media framing says that frames highlight some information in a news report while ignoring other information related to the same report. Similarly, Entman (1993) describes media framing as the attribution of salience to selected aspects of a story, and he adds that frames inherently contain moral judgments and recommendations. Gitlin (1980) says that in addition to selecting and emphasizing particular parts of news reports, media frames demonstrate patterns of presentation which may organize specific patterns of cognition and interpretation among audience members. Effects of political news frames may thus influence how members of a public think about and talk about current events and issues; therefore, news frames may have consequences for public knowledge in terms of both what they emphasize and what they exclude.

Strategy framing research.

The strategy frame for political news coverage makes salient the tactics used by competing political actors. Capella and Jamieson (1997) explain that strategy news frames tell "a particular kind of story—focusing on winning and losing, positioning for advantage, and implicating self-interested motivation" (86). There is consistent evidence and general agreement in political communication research that, in recent years, strategy frames for political news have come to dominate US mainstream political news (Valentino, Beckman, and Buhr 2001; Gastil 2008; Jackson 2011; Farnsworth and Lichter 2011). Commonly cited explanations for the heightened presence of strategy frames in political news are that it is cheaper and easier to

produce than in-depth or investigative news coverage (Anderson and Thorson 1989) and that it is a realistic reflection of a highly strategic political environment that members of the press consider themselves obligated to expose (Aalberg et al. 2012; Brants, de Vreese, Moller, and van Praag 2010).

Strategy frames are often presented as the antithesis of issue frames in the political communication literature (e.g., Capella and Jamieson 1997; Rhee 1997). Whereas strategy frames focus on contests among political actors, issue frames focus on the substance of policies and issues. Theoretically, when members of the public obtain information from issue-framed news they will possess stronger confidence in political processes and they are more likely to participate in activities associated with citizenship, such as voting and attending public meetings (Capella and Jamieson 1997). Capella and Jamieson (1997) use the following examples to illustrate differences between the strategy frame and the issue frame:

Where an issue story might report . . . that candidates “Ed Rendell and Joseph Egan took turns outlining how they would run Philadelphia without raising taxes. They made their pitches to residents in the Spring Garden section of Philadelphia,” the strategy condition dropped the tax information into the middle of the story and led simply by saying that they “took turns tonight making pitches to residents of the Spring Garden Section of Philadelphia.” (35)

The following discussion will describe the strategy frame’s origins and features, reveal challenges resulting from varying conceptualizations of strategy framing, and introduce Aalberg, Stromback and de Vreese’s (2012) *strategic game macro frame* delineating dimensions of separate *strategy* and *game micro frames* in order to promote greater clarity in media framing research.

Origins of strategy framing research.

News coverage of political campaigns that focuses heavily on polling and strategy was originally termed “horse race” coverage. According to Aalberg et al. (2012), the *game frame* was an early metaphor used in communication research to describe this type of coverage, and it remains a central concept in the literature. However, much attention from the field has shifted to the concept of the *strategy frame*. Early discussions of the strategy frame, like the game frame, focus upon the competition between political actors, the spectatorship of citizens, and the significance of polling data for tracking who is winning. For example, Jamieson (1992) identifies the following five features of strategy frames: (1) Winning and losing as the central concern, (2) the language of wars, games, and competition, (3) a story with performers, critics, and audience, (4) the centrality of performance, style, and perception of the candidate, and (5) heavy emphasis placed upon polls. Similarly, Patterson (1993) identifies three features of strategy frames: (1) the game as the central campaign narrative, (2) heavy emphasis placed upon polling information, and (3) the public as audience to the spectacle performed by politicians. Game metaphors make up multiple dimensions listed in the above features of early definitions of the strategy frame.

Strategy framing research’s origins in the study of “horse race” coverage can further be seen in Capella and Jamieson’s (1997) seminal strategy framing effects research in which they frequently swap the terms “strategy frame” and “game frame” as if they intend for the terms to be interchangeable. Likewise, Rhee (1997) conflates the strategy and game frames when describing strategy coverage in the following way: “‘War’ and ‘game’ metaphors play a central role in strategy coverage [and] in strategy coverage, candidates’ poll standings are often depicted in terms of scoring in a ball game” (31). Lawrence (2000) similarly uses the terms

“game frame” and “strategy frame” interchangeably in her article “Game-Framing the Issues: Tracking the Strategy Frame in Public Policy News,” in which she refers to the game frame as a news report framed in strategic terms.

Developments in strategy framing research.

Results of recent research have shown that important distinctions exist between game and strategy frames and are significant in terms of whether or not they are likely to activate public cynicism in response to political news coverage (Aalberg et al. 2012). Although game frames commonly involve the language of war and may distract voters from the substance of policy debates, research has shown that the emphasis on polling and discourses related to winning and losing do not necessarily lead to strategic learning (Valentino et al. 2001), which Capella and Jamieson (1997) identify as the precursor of political cynicism. In fact, Iyengar, Norpoth, and Hahn (2004) demonstrate that the game frame may improve political engagement by making coverage comprehensible and exciting for audiences. It is therefore important for future research to distinguish more clearly which framing dimensions are being studied and to consider the differences between strategy and game frames when positing relationships between media frames and effects (de Vreese 2005).

To that end, Aalberg et al. (2012) recommend distinguishing between the strategy and game frames as two micro frames of which the broader *strategic game macro frame* is composed. Aalberg et al.’s *game micro frame* conceptualizes news stories focused on actors’ gamesmanship and audiences’ spectatorship, for which they identify the following four frame dimensions: (1) winning and losing, (2) public opinion polls, (3) approval ratings from particular interest groups, and (4) speculating about election or policy outcomes. In contrast, the *strategy micro frame* is characterized by the following five features, which focus on strategic aspects of

political performances: (1) interpretations of political actors' motives for adopting a position, (2) the strategies and tactics underlying political actions, (3) how political actors campaign, (4) political actors' leadership style, and/or (5) the presence of metacoverage, which refers to news coverage about the press's behavior. If, going forward, scholars maintain a conceptual distinction between *game micro frames* and *strategy micro frames* in their research, then they may find further support for Aalberg et al.'s (2012) argument that the dimensions of the *game micro frame* are less likely to activate cynicism than are the characteristics of the *strategy micro frame*.

Strategy framing and the personalization of politics.

A main concern related to both game-framed and strategy-framed news coverage is the exclusion of an active public role from their portrayals of political processes. This concern has also arisen in political communication literature discussing the increasing personalization of politics, which refers to the process through which media bestow celebrity status upon political candidates. Mansell (2010) argues that much of today's political news coverage demonstrates the personalization of politics, and Skewes (2007) calls personalization today's media currency. While personalized politics celebrate individual political actors, a result of this type of coverage is that it distracts the public's attention from the mechanics of political organizing and building democratic coalitions (Rahat and Sheaffer 2007). Although personalization draws larger audiences to media outlets for political news (Iyengar et al. 2004), audiences are more likely to be positioned as spectators to the game of politics rather than as participants in the political process. If strategy and game frames depict political processes as a competition among elite political actors, then audience efficacy, or the audience's perception that it can affect politics, is minimized because the public can only observe the action. Importantly, although audiences may stay tuned into strategic news coverage, Capella and Jamieson (1997) argue that the fact that they

do so as spectators may make them more likely to attribute strategic motivations to political actions. Strategic attributions are the precursor to distrust, which Capella and Jamieson believe leads to political cynicism.

Political cynicism.

Cynicism is one dimension of political disengagement (Lee 2005). According to Capella and Jamieson (1997), political cynicism's key features are the absence of trust in political actors and processes and the attribution of self-interest to politicians' actions. In other words, cynicism occurs when citizens perceive that public officials are motivated by the pursuit winning elections and/or policy debates rather than the pursuit of the public good (Capella and Jamieson 1997). Cynicism may be related to a reduction in efficacy among citizens and may reduce individuals' confidence in politics and government as a whole (Lee 2005). Political cynicism's relationship to political news frames concerns political communication scholars because normative theories of democracy rely upon politically engaged publics (Capella and Jamieson 1997; Hart and Hartelius 2007). If members of the public become cynical about political processes and believe that they have little ability to influence government, then they may choose to abstain from participation in political processes because they perceive them to be out of their control.

In eleven out of eighteen tests with hundreds of participants, Capella and Jamieson (1997) demonstrate that exposure to strategy-framed political news increases two measures of cynicism: *political cynicism*, which measures "general distrust of the political process and its participants" (144), and *cynical learning*, which measures the audience's strategic recall from news coverage. They also tested for the presence of a third measure of cynicism, *cynical motivation*, which measures the degree to which participants attribute self-interested motivations to politicians' actions, but they found no support that it was an effect of strategy frames. They

retained the two supported measures, *political cynicism* and *cynical learning*, and combined them into a single category of *political cynicism*.

Capella and Jamieson suggest that audiences automatically make negative trait inferences about political actors because they fit easily into audiences' cynical political narratives. However, their lack of evidence that strategy frames actually increase the audience's perception that politicians act on behalf of self-interested motivations seems inconsistent with their conceptualization of cynicism, which centers on both distrust and the attribution of self-interest to politicians' actions. The strategy-cynicism link therefore needs greater attention from researchers in order to determine precisely which cynical inferences audiences make when consuming strategy-framed news. The next section will describe the cognitive processes leading to political cynicism that some media effects scholars suggest occur as audiences consume strategy-framed news.

Cognitive explanations for cynical effects.

Two possible explanations for framing effects on political judgments are on-line and memory-based processing of information (Capella and Jamieson 1997). On-line processes, according to Hastie and Park (1986), occur when individuals make judgments as they receive information. Lodge, Steenberger, and Brau (1995) argue that judgments about candidates in political campaigns occur primarily through on-line processes. They observed that individuals typically evaluated political candidates as they were receiving information about the candidates. In their study, two groups completed attitude and opinion assessments and then read information about a campaign. Half of the participants then listed what they liked and disliked about the candidates in order to increase retention of the information in stored memory, and participants in the other half of the sample were instead sent home without completing an evaluation/memory

task. Up to one month later, participants in both groups were contacted and asked to recall information about the candidates and then were asked to participate in an evaluation of the candidates (for those participants who had completed an evaluation in the first stage, this was their second evaluation). Among individuals in both groups, memory for campaign messages was low, but candidate evaluations remained consistent, suggesting that on-line rather than memory-based processes determine judgments. The generalizability of the findings is limited by the fact that no real candidates or campaigns were covered, and as a result no narratives or emotional storylines, which are typical contextual features that develop from ongoing news coverage, were present to enable better memory. However, the results are important indicators that memory is not likely to be the sole source of political judgments.

Capella and Jamieson (1997) acknowledge that on-line processing may be common in situations in which researchers request judgments related to candidate impressions and comparisons, but they argue that framing effects that manifest in everyday living are actually a combination of on-line processes and memory-based processing. Memory-based processing occurs when judgments are made based on information that has already been processed and stored in long-term memory (Hastie and Park 1986). Memory-based models of framing effects assume that media audiences make political judgments after retrieving information that has been stored in audience members' memory.

Price and Tewksbury's (1997) memory-based explanation of framing effects says that news frames make some memories more accessible than others, and the effect of the news frame essentially depends upon what information it makes most accessible from stored memory for integration into political judgment. In theory, news frames prime audiences for political learning through a process in which they activate particular knowledge pathways while bypassing others

and consequently make some nodes of stored information more accessible than others (D'Angelo, Calderone, and Territola 2005). News frames therefore influence the types of inferences individuals make as they process political information and the result is the individual's political judgment of the candidate. The memory-based model for cognitively processing news content offers a foundation for the schema-based models posited by Capella and Jamieson (1997) and Rhee (1997) in their accounts of the cognitive basis for framing effects, which the following section will detail.

Schema-based models of framing effects.

Because strategy frames now dominate political news, the "strategy schema" has become the American public's dominant schema for interpreting political news (Capella and Jamieson 1997, 118; Patterson 1993; Jamieson 1992). According to Capella and Jamieson (1997), the cynical effect of strategy framing is a result of the news frame priming mental associations in audiences' strategy schema for interpreting political news. Capella and Jamieson's (1997) *schematic activation hypothesis* depicts the schema-based relationship between strategy framing and cynicism. It posits that when news frames make strategy salient, those strategy frames cue the activation of associative networks in audiences' knowledge systems. Capella and Jamieson say that political knowledge is stored in networks of nodes, and strategy frames may stimulate knowledge stored in strategy nodes while failing to activate issue or policy knowledge stores. Strategy frames activate nodes associated with self-interested motives and thus invite negative trait inferences by implying that political actors' motivations are strategic rather than assuming that politicians' actions and campaign tactics are genuine self-expressions (Capella and Jamieson 1997). Capella and Jamieson argue that we make trait inferences almost automatically because they are easily accessible and fit with our pre-existing strategy schema.

Theoretically, when audiences focus upon the political actor's self-interested motivation rather than the substance of policies, they will evaluate politics more cynically. The cynical effects of cognitively processing strategy-framed news may arise in political discourses among media audiences and members of the wider public, and those discourses are reinforced by additional strategy-framed news coverage and public discourses (Capella and Jamieson 1997). Capella and Jamieson's (1997) "spiral of cynicism" suggests, furthermore, that after extended exposure to strategy frames, cynicism about political news is "cultivated" (Gerbner 1998) into cynicism about the broader political system.

Similarly, Rhee (1997) poses a schema-based *discourse model* for processing political news. Rhee argues that strategy frames increase strategic recall and make strategic explanations for politics easier to adopt because of their congruence with audiences' existing strategy schema for political news. The discourse model explicates how audiences construct mental models for interpreting political news in a three-step process. First, during the reception of news texts, audiences process information in working memory that subsequently activates related concepts in long-term memory. In the second step, the integration of knowledge, concepts that have been activated in long-term memory are integrated with incoming textual information. In this step audiences make inferences from stored knowledge to supplement textual information, and they may choose to ignore information that is inconsistent with their knowledge stores. Finally, in the construction of the discourse model, textual and stored information are integrated as a system of propositions to form a mental model representing the audience member's interpretation of the news. Interestingly, Rhee claims that audiences' discourse models are updated and modified rather than altogether rejected and replaced. Additionally, she finds significant support for the relationship between strategy frames and strategic learning. However, not all of the research

results have so consistently supported the schematic activation hypothesis. The following section will sort through some of the inconsistencies.

Varying findings in framing research results.

Though the connection between strategy news frames and elevated strategic recall is extensively documented, the schematic activation research demonstrates inconsistencies that complicate the proposed connections between cynicism, strategy news frames, and political disengagement and thus create further research questions. Capella and Jamieson's (1997) schematic activation hypothesis was supported in their research in that strategy news frames did increase strategic learning, but it was complicated by surprisingly high levels of strategic learning for issue coverage, as well. In fact, mean scores for strategic learning were slightly higher in the issue-framed news coverage condition than in the strategy-framed news coverage condition across all of Capella and Jamieson's health care reform experiments. This challenges their expectation that issue-framed news will activate issue schemas and therefore produce more substantive learning effects than strategy-framed news.

Jackson's (2011) findings further complicate the schematic activation hypothesis. In an investigation of the effects of strategy-framed versus issue-framed news in the United Kingdom, Jackson finds "no specific difference in cynicism between the issue and strategy samples" (88). Additionally, Jackson's research shows a differing effect for strategy-framed news on measures of issue-specific and global cynicism. Jackson uses the global cynicism measure to assess "the character and motivations of politicians, alongside satisfaction with the political system, *beyond the confines of the media stimulus material*" (78; emphasis in original). The findings of his research indicate that there is little effect on global cynicism as a result of consuming the news, but there may be an increase in cynicism for issue-specific measures. This finding contests

Capella and Jamieson's (1997) assumption that audiences project cynicism about specific political events and issues onto broader political system. Valentino et al. (2001), like Jackson, show an increase in strategic knowledge for individuals exposed to strategy news; however, unlike Jackson, their research finds that strategy-based understandings of political action diminish individuals' overall confidence in government, which seems to support Capella and Jamieson's expectation of the extension of cynicism from individual issues to broader political systems.

Moderating variables contribute some additional information regarding the degree to which audiences might be affected by news frames, but findings related to moderating variables are also inconsistent. The level of political knowledge an individual possesses prior to exposure to a news story is assumed to be the strongest factor influencing whether a news story's frame affects political cynicism, and much of the research argues that higher knowledge levels minimize the potential effects of news frames (Capella and Jamieson 1997; Valentino et al. 2001; Jackson 2011). However, Rhee's (1997) findings show no significant effect on political cynicism related to knowledge level. Findings are further mixed regarding whether cynical responses to news coverage actually decrease the likelihood of voting. Valentino et al. (2001) show that self-reported voting likelihood decreased among audiences to the cynical frame, yet Jackson (2011) reports that numerous studies throughout the last decade have shown that increases in strategy framing have not been indicative of lower voter turnout. The evidence collected thus far paints an unclear picture of cynicism's actual effect on voting behaviors. However, it is also important to consider that voting is not the only, nor necessarily the ultimate, behavior associated with citizenship.

Deliberative framing.

Although framing effects research is extensive, communication scholars have yet to answer the question prompted by inconsistent findings related to Capella and Jamieson's (1997) schematic activation hypothesis: Is there a format for political news that might decrease, rather than an increase, political cynicism? As an alternative to the issue frame, some political communication theorists advocate the need for a deliberative model for news coverage (Simon and Xenos, 2000; Habermas 2006; Bohman 2007; Gastil 2008; Carcasson and Sprain 2010). Simon and Xenos (2000) extend previous research on framing to connect the act of framing to the act of deliberating. They argue that media framing is, essentially, the construction of political issues, and in public deliberation, frames interact and compete with one another for support (367). They claim that media can be a locus for public deliberation, provided that media outlets are engaging in multivalent framing. Therefore, as I examined *TDS*, I considered how it includes multiple perspectives on the debt ceiling negotiations.

Gastil (2008) proposes a deliberative mass media model that "would promote public knowledge and enlightened public opinion through engaging, substantive programming" (50).

Carcasson and Sprain (2010) suggest that

a deliberative media would focus more on engaging broad audiences, uncovering the underlying value dilemmas and tough choices inherent to public issues, and providing the public with a clearer understanding of both the relevant facts *and* the relevant tradeoffs tied to key issues. Such a media would shift away from a focus on conflict and politics as a spectacle and take more responsibility for improving the quality of public discussion.
(II)

However, Gastil cites the recent decline in investigative journalism and the media's failure to include a true diversity of viewpoints in news reports as evidence that we do not currently have a deliberative media system. He further observes that in one-sided political climates the media will

often simply mirror the popular message without adequate interrogation. The resulting risk to the public is that “if the mass media convey the elite debate to the public so that citizens can deliberate, then it should be no surprise that when there exists an elite consensus—or at least only a weak voice of dissent—the media carry that message, uncritically, to the public” (55). Finally, Gastil explains that while there is room for partisan perspectives in the mass media environment, there is a serious threat from sources that claim to provide unbiased information while still practicing partisanism, and he identifies Fox News Channel—a common target of *TDS*—as “the clearest case of such an entity in the present media environment” (57).

Wessler (2008) offers instructions for assessing whether media content is deliberately framed. He says, “A normative perspective highlighting the democratic value of public deliberation puts the strongest emphasis on *how* ideas should be exchanged in the mass media” (3; emphasis in original). According to Wessler, news is deliberative when it includes justifications for a claim or idea that is expressed, rebuttals that refer to and argue against the idea that they oppose, the co-presence of conflicting ideas or policy positions, civility/the absence of inflammatory speech, and/or the presence of a direct response within a single segment or episode by one speaker to a claim made by another speaker in the same segment or episode. Wessler’s dimensions of deliberativeness require some modification in order to fulfill the key analytical processes central to deliberation outlined by Gastil (2008) and Carcasson and Sprain (2010) above. Primarily, more than merely exposing conflicting positions, deliberative media should consider the key values at stake, or “explore the underlying public concerns behind the surface facts” (Gastil 2008, 52). This requires news media to actually scrutinize, rather than just juxtapose, varying viewpoints.

Although this study does not measure *TDS*'s actual framing effect on audiences, it does consider the satire's potential effects in the political public sphere based upon the message production strategies that I expose through content analysis of the show. This research seeks to extend the current debate regarding *TDS*'s potential effect on audiences' political engagement by offering insight to the framing elements present in *TDS*'s message production. Thus, the following is the second research question guiding this study:

RQ 2: How does *TDS* frame its satiric coverage of political news, and what are the potential resulting framing effects for audiences?

Each of the two research question posed in this chapter will guide an ensuing analysis chapter. The first analysis examines *TDS*'s redaction strategies for satiric critique of politics and evaluates their potential contribution(s) to the public's political knowledge. The analysis of redaction reveals evidence that supports the perspective that *TDS* performs a useful watchdog service in the public sphere by engaging redaction strategies for holding political actors accountable when their personal or partisan political interests supersede the public's interest. The second analysis responds to the charge that *TDS* promotes political cynicism by examining *TDS*'s use of strategy, game, and deliberative frames for coverage of political news and evaluating their potential implications for audiences. The framing analysis exposes production strategies that may present obstacles for audiences' meaningful political engagement by drawing attention to the strategy motivating political actions and therefore promoting strategic, rather than substantive, political learning and consequently discouraging audiences from participating in what they perceive as a corrupt political system. In the next section, I will detail my methods of analysis.

Methods

This study includes two analyses of *TDS*. The following discussion outlines the methods I used in each analysis. In it, I outline the research procedures that I followed, and then I discuss my sample of *TDS* segments.

Procedures

After transcribing each segment, I analyzed their engagement of redaction strategies in order to answer RQ 1, and then I analyzed the frames they engage in order to answer RQ 2. Both analyses deductively applied typologies that were derived from the literature that I have reviewed. First, I coded each segment for the presence of Jones's (2010) typology of redaction strategies featuring Stewart's four prosecutor roles (*interrogating multiple witnesses*, *cross-examining the defendant*, *summarizing evidence*, and *the closing statement*). Once I established that there is evidence to support Jones's claim that redaction serves *TDS* as a primary mode of critique, I then analyzed their rhetorical functions by following Root's (1987) instruction in *The Rhetorics of Popular Culture: Advertising, Advocacy, and Entertainment*, which directs the scholar performing rhetorical analysis of popular culture to repeatedly ask, "What is the mode of presentation? How does the mode affect the presentation? . . . What is the purpose of the discourse? How is the discourse arranged to achieve that purpose? . . . What is the argument of the discourse?" (21).

Next, I turned my attention to *TDS*'s framing strategies. My analysis of how *TDS* frames its satiric coverage of political news shows the extent to which *TDS*'s critique deploys strategy, game, and/or deliberative framing practices for its "fake" news coverage and thus indicates what framing effect *TDS* might have among its audiences. In order to systematically analyze *TDS*'s framing of political news, my first step was to code the transcripts for dimensions of strategy,

game, and deliberative frames in order to determine their presence or absence. I coded the segments following Aalberg et al.'s (2012) instruction for delineating the strategy and game micro frames and Wessler's (2008) instruction for measuring the deliberativeness of political news. Per Aalberg et al.'s coding directions, I coded each framing dimension's presence with one of two codes: 0 = not present, and 1 = present.

The strategy frame was coded as present for segments that include any or all of the following five dimensions: 1. interpretations of candidates' or parties' motives for political actions and positions, 2. coverage of campaign strategies and tactics for achieving political goals, 3. coverage of how candidates or parties campaign, 4. commentary on politicians' leadership style and integrity, including discussion of their personal traits, and/or 5. metacoverage (Aalberg et al. 2012). The game frame was coded as present for segments that portray politics as a game and include any of the following four dimensions: 1. coverage of who is winning and losing, 2. coverage of public opinion polls, 3. commentary regarding approval or disapproval from interests groups or publics, and/or 4. speculation about potential policy or election outcomes (Aalberg et al. 2012). Finally, deliberative framing was coded as present for segments that include any of the following dimensions, which are adapted from Wessler's (2008) study of print journalism suggesting that future research should "include nonprint media in a search for instances of public deliberation" (16): 1. justifications for ideas or claims expressed, 2. rebuttals that refer to and present counterarguments to specific arguments, 3. the representation of conflicting positions, 4. civility in speech, or the absence of inflammatory language, and/or 5. the presence of a response by one speaker to another speaker. Although I have already discussed reasons why Wessler's typology is imperfect, I use it here because it provides the most straightforward measures for a quantitative analysis of mediated deliberation.

Once I coded for the strategy, game, and deliberative news frames' dimensions' presence or absence, I determined the dominant, secondary, and tertiary frames of each *TDS* segment. The dominant, secondary, and tertiary frames were determined for each segment by counting the frequency of the strategy, game, and deliberative frames' presence or absence along with special consideration of the segment's lead in cases in which two or more frames occurred with equal frequency. Lastly, I considered *TDS*'s arrangement of frames in terms of their order and their interaction with the graphics that appeared in the coverage.

Sample

The sample I selected for analysis consists of nineteen *TDS* segments that aired between June 29 and August 3, 2011. Each segment addressed the political debate surrounding the 2011 congressional vote to raise the US debt ceiling, and each segment that addressed the debt ceiling in that time frame was included with the exception of interview segments, which I omitted from the sample in order to limit the scope of this research. The units of analysis for this study were the segments. The debt ceiling negotiations were chosen for this research because they exemplify a timely example of the increasing ideological rigidity involved in national politics and they thus present a rich text for obtaining insights into the interdependence between politics and news media in an increasingly divisive political environment. Below, Table 1 details the segments included in this sample.

Table 1: TDS Segments

	Segment Title	Air Date
A	“Broke Bank Mounting”	June 29, 2011
B	“Broke Bank Mounting: America’s Dystopian Future”	June 29, 2011
C	“Welcome Back to Morass”	July 11, 2011
D	“Dancing on the Ceiling”	July 12, 2011
E	“Dancing on the Ceiling: Tax Cut Religion” (with senior debt correspondent Wyatt Cenac)	July 12, 2011
F	“Men of a Certain Rage”	July 14, 2011
G	“Armadebton 2011: The End of the World as We Owe It: Men of a Certain Rage”	July 14, 2011
H	“Armadebton 2011: No Visible Progress”	July 18, 2011
I	“Armadebton 2011: Republicans Think Obama is Obsessed”	July 18, 2011
J	“Armadebton 2011: National Bulls**t Ceiling” (with national bulls**t ceiling analyst Jason Jones)	July 18, 2011
K	“Armadebton 2011: Nonfiction Captain America”	July 25, 2011
L	“Armadebton 2011: Call Congress”	July 26, 2011
M	“Armadebton 2011: Rightans”	July 26, 2011
N	“Republicans Watch ‘The Town’”	July 28, 2011
O	“Dealageddon! A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Compromise”	August 1, 2011
P	“Dealageddon! A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Compromise: A Tea Party No-Win”	August 1, 2011
Q	“Dealageddon! A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Compromise: National Enemies”	August 3, 2011
R	“Dealageddon! A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Compromise: Super Committee”	August 3, 2011
S	“Dealageddon! A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Compromise: The Analysis Mob” (with Wyatt Cenac, Jason Jones, and Sam Bee)	August 3, 2011

II: Battling Obfuscation with Redaction

Comedy has served as a mode of critique of politics in popular culture since the political cartoon's appearance in the eighteenth century, which arose as a way of revealing alternative "truths" for political news (Bostdorff 1987). *TDS*'s satiric critique of the strategies underlying political speech acts is a contemporary example of how comedy can serve to critique and to contribute alternative political discourses to the public sphere. In a recent interview, Stewart said of *TDS*, "If we do anything in a positive sense for the world, it's to provide one little bit of context that's very specifically focused, and . . . this is how we fight back . . . and that's my way of not being helpless and not being hopeless" (Moyers 2011, 8). This chapter will consider how *TDS*'s redaction strategies enable the show's writers and producers to critique, or "fight back" against, instances of *strategic communication* (Habermas 1984) in politics and offer what Burke (1964) termed *perspective by incongruity*, or new meanings, for strategic communication in the political public sphere. In the following discussion, I will briefly review satire's historically critical relationship to politics. I will define strategic communication and perspective by incongruity and describe their implications for political learning and engagement in the politics. Finally, I will analyze examples from *TDS*'s debt ceiling coverage demonstrating the show's execution of each of the four redactions strategies identified in Jones's (2010) typology of Stewart's prosecutor roles, and I will discuss how they suggest alternative truths for instances of strategic communication in politics.

Critique through Political Satire

Critique is the heart of political satire. According to Gray, Jones, and Thompson (2009), satire is a "verbal *attack* that in some way passes *judgment* on the object of that attack" (12; emphasis in original). Satire is not a new type of media text; rather, it is a historically established cultural and literary tradition. For example, satire is demonstrated in the works of

authors such as Jonathan Swift, Jane Austen, and Mark Twain. However, satire's history with television is much shorter because the genre has only recently gained popularity in the medium with the rise of cable television (Gray, Jones, and Thompson 2009). Gray, Jones, and Thompson claim satire's "tenuous" relationship to television and its resulting underutilization "has been to the detriment of a more-engaged citizenry, for to satirize is to scrutinize and therefore to encourage one's audience to scrutinize as well" (11). According to their reasoning, because *TDS* demonstrates scrutiny of political communication, it encourages the audience to also engage in scrutiny of politics. The following analysis of specific instances of critique will show just how *TDS* exemplifies scrutiny for its audience.

A close relative of satire is parody, and it is commonly confused with satire. This confusion results from satire's frequent utilization of parody as a strategy for critique. *TDS* frequently demonstrates parody in its satiric remaking of the "real" news, perhaps most clearly in parody news interviews with the *TDS* News Team. Baym (2005) says that *TDS*'s parody is "an aping that simultaneously reinvokes and challenges," and it allows Stewart and his fake news team to use their performance to illustrate "that many of those who posture as 'real' journalists likewise are playing a role" (269). Baym identifies three specific themes of Stewart's critique through parody: the news media's tendency to make trivial stories into news while trivializing more important information, its celebration "of the reporter as the central actor in the story," and its "reliance on conventional frames and stock narratives" (270). *TDS*'s parody thus demonstrates scrutiny of news media as well as political actors. The following section will turn to a discussion of the type of communication *TDS* is concerned with critiquing.

Strategic Communication

According to Gastil (2008), Habermas's (1979, 1989) *ideal speech situation* is one of the two foundations for the public discussion model utilized in public deliberation. An ideal speech situation is a situation "in which two or more persons could infinitely question one another's beliefs about the world until each perspective has been fully scrutinized, leaving only a limited set of valid statements on which to base one's conclusions about an issue" (Gastil 2008, 19). The ideal speech situation, as its name suggests, offers a normative model of communication to strive toward in an effort to improve the conditions for public communication; however, Mouffe (1999) has pointed to multiple reasons that make the ideal speech situation impossible in a pluralist democracy. The ideal speech situation nonetheless serves as a guiding principle for democratic communication in a deliberative paradigm.

Strategic communication is the antithesis of the ideal speech situation, and Habermas (1984) describes it as a speech act motivated by a goal of success rather than understanding. Strategic speech acts are commonly the targets of *TDS*'s satiric critique. Strategic communication can take one of two forms, and both forms appear as subjects of *TDS*'s critique of the debt ceiling debate. *Open strategic action* is both intentional and unhidden. By contrast, in *concealed strategic action*, a speaker's motives are never made explicit. *Concealed strategic action* occurs in two forms. The first form is *systematically distorted communication*, in which political actors who are unaware that they have been deceived unconsciously deceive others in their strategies for success. The media may perpetuate systematically distorted communication through what Booth (2006) calls "unconscious, undeliberate miseducation" (134). The second form of concealed strategic action is *conscious deception*, in which political actors are intentionally manipulative in their strategies for success. The media may perpetuate this through

“conscious, deliberate miseducation” (Booth 2006, 136). Normative models of democracy, especially deliberative paradigms, are critical of strategic communication. However, in actual practice, which is demonstrated by the debt ceiling debate, much of political discourse involves strategic interaction. Theoretically, public deliberation counteracts strategic communication and media miseducation. Habermas (2006) says that the process of deliberation develops a truth-tracking potential which can reveal strategic speech acts, and Bohman (2007) suggests that deliberation may enable error avoidance.

Whether political leaders can and do effectively practice deliberation remains an important question. Although Gastil (2008) suggests that political leaders should demonstrate deliberative discourse through their interactions with one another in order to model deliberation for wider public discourses, in his discussion about how legislators in the US Congress communicate he identifies at least three obstacles which interfere with legislative deliberation. The first is a decline in political civility, which is demonstrated by the increasing “ideological extremism” represented in voting patterns since the 1960s (Gastil 2008, 132). Related to that, the second obstacle affecting legislative deliberation is *message discipline*, which strips speeches of originality in favor of repeating party messages aligned with predetermined talking points. Gastil says that, as a result, “floor speeches have become little more than recitations of strategic speeches” that he terms *legislative karaoke* (133-134). The third obstacle Gastil identifies is less straightforward. Lobbyists and special interests create opportunities for public voices to enter the legislative process, yet the current lobbying system often privileges powerful interest groups that do not necessarily advocate on behalf of the public good. One such example is a 1996 Boeing lobbying campaign in which Boeing spent 5.3 million dollars in order to secure a 33 million-

dollar tax rebate (Gastil 2008, 137). In this way, lobbying practices may contradict the deliberative ideals of equality and inclusion.

Gastil (2008) also considers the deliberative impact of the political agenda that Congress sets. Congress's agenda frames the boundaries of the legislative conversation; therefore, it determines the legislative possibilities that are taken up for deliberation. However, according to Gastil, the agenda is also a product of legislative deliberation reflecting that which Congress deems is important. Therefore, it is useful to think of the legislative agenda as a product of deliberation. The following examination of *TDS*'s coverage of the debt ceiling negotiations provides numerous examples of how the show critiques the legislature's communication about the debt ceiling debate.

***TDS*'s Satiric Critique of Strategic Communication**

Strategic communication may be open or concealed, but it is always motivated by an objective to succeed rather than understand, and it thus detracts from deliberative communication (Habermas 1984). This discussion will turn specifically to *TDS*'s satiric critique of strategic communication through redaction, and it will show that all of Jones's (2010) typology of four redaction techniques are at work in *TDS*'s coverage of the debt ceiling debate, that they are frequently utilized for critiquing instances of strategic communication in political discourses, and that they enable *TDS* to create *perspective by incongruity* (Burke, 1954), or an alternative perspective, on the political discourses surrounding the debt ceiling negotiation.

Perspective by Incongruity

Burke (1964) says, "The notion of perspective by incongruity would suggest that . . . one casts out demons by a vocabulary of *conversion*, by an *incongruous* naming, by calling them *the very thing . . . they are not*" (64; emphasis in original). Perspective by incongruity is

accomplished by altering an orientation or expectation by drawing attention to that which is inconsistent or not in agreement, and Bostdorff (1987) explains it with the following example:

This concept is illustrated in the children's story, "The Emperor's New Clothes," where the citizens' orientation toward their ruler's nakedness is to believe that he actually is wearing a beautiful new outfit, which only the wise can see. When a small child blurts out that the emperor has no clothes on, he calls the new wardrobe the one thing the others do not believe it is. Through this misnaming, the other subjects change their perceptions and breathe a sigh of relief In short, they gain a new perspective as a result of the incongruity. (44-45)

TDS creates perspective by incongruity through the practice of systematically identifying mediated political moments from across time and space to clearly illustrate their incongruence, reveal the political strategy underlying them, and offer "new meanings" (Burke, 1954) for them. Perspective by incongruity reorients *TDS*'s audience in relationship to strategic communication so that the audience is positioned to recognize alternative meanings for strategic speech acts. This enables reform and reclassification of previously taken-for-granted or agreed-upon knowledge and may enable alternative perspectives to enter the public's political discourse.

Levasseur (1993) argues that the potential advantage of creating new meanings for old phenomena is that "such new meanings could cause society to re-examine and question its existing orientation Such a re-examination provides society with a chance to adopt a new and more serviceable orientation" (III). Dow (1994) similarly suggests that planned incongruity attempts to reorient the audience, and she further points out that if audiences of planned incongruity "are being asked to abandon the position they currently occupy, they must have a place to go and a means to get there" (239). Therefore, as I examined how *TDS* operates, I paid close attention to whether the show simply deconstructs political strategies and media frames, or if it additionally reconstructs by proffering its audience access to new meanings.

Burke's (1964) notion of perspective by incongruity utilizes "boundary-spanning rhetorical strategies, which produce the desired but jarring effect of fresh perspective" (Ivie 2004, 30). The following discussion will detail specifically how *TDS* generates fresh perspective. Through rhetorical analysis, I will expand upon Jones's (2010) typology of redaction strategies to argue that redaction enables *TDS* to offer alternative perspectives on political discourses by highlighting instances of incongruity in strategic discourses surrounding the 2011 debt ceiling negotiation.

Redaction and perspective by incongruity.

Redaction was a primary strategy for *TDS*'s critique of political discourses surrounding the 2011 debt ceiling debate. This analysis shows evidence of the pervasiveness of Jones's (2010) typology of redaction strategies in *TDS*'s coverage of the debt ceiling debate and further describes the ways in which *TDS* deploys the redaction strategies in order to offer alternative perspectives for strategic communication in the public sphere. The following discussion will detail specific examples of *TDS* putting each type of redaction strategy to work to create perspective by incongruity.

Interrogating multiple witnesses.

One way in which *TDS* accomplishes perspective by incongruity is through putting multiple political actors in dialogue with one another, or *interrogating multiple witnesses*. This was particularly well illustrated in segment D, which first features footage of Representative Boehner, the Republican Speaker of the House, asserting in a press conference that the only fair approach to the debt ceiling negotiation is one in which "the administration gets its debt limit increase, and the American people get their spending cuts." Stewart interrogates Boehner's language, identifying the strategic communication that Boehner engages to imply that raising the

debt limit, which Stewart interjects to point out is an “arbitrary spending limit, which Congresses led by both parties have increased ten times in the last ten years,” is now the Republican’s “big give” in the debt ceiling negotiation.

TDS thus highlights the information that Boehner strategically omits, which is that the debt limit is arbitrary and it has, as standard practice, been increased an average of once per year for the last decade by Congresses led by both political parties. Further, because the audience sees that Stewart has access to the knowledge that raising the debt ceiling has historically been standard practice, the audience can extrapolate that Boehner, too, has access to the same knowledge yet consciously omits that information from his argument. In this way, *TDS* gives new meaning to Boehner’s consciously deceptive speech act.

TDS then cuts to news footage from an interview with Boehner’s fellow Republican, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, which further indicts Boehner:

McConnell: Nobody’s talking about not raising the debt limit. I haven’t heard that discussed by anybody.

Reporter: Some of them are.

McConnell: Not in the Congress, nobody’s talking about that.

By putting actors who apparently should agree, in this case Boehner and McConnell, into a dialogue with one another when they do not, *TDS* uses redaction to accomplish perspective by incongruity. By arranging Boehner and McConnell’s messages so that their contradiction becomes clear, *TDS* exposes the strategy underlying Boehner’s position. This helps the audience to recognize the political maneuvering which motivates Boehner’s speech, and in so doing, it criticizes Boehner for developing a discourse of hollow threats that involve consciously deceptive speech. Critiques of this nature demonstrate close scrutiny of strategic speech surrounding the debt ceiling negotiations, and this kind of scrutiny is required for developing the

skills of the skeptic that, according to Hart and Hartelius (2007), are essential for enlightened citizenship.

Cross-examining the defendant.

Another way in which *TDS* accomplishes perspective by incongruity is by juxtaposing an individual political actor's conflicting speech acts in order to reveal the underlying strategy at work, or what Jones (2010) termed *cross-examining the defendant*. In one example of *cross-examination* in segment O, *TDS* interrogates the terms of the debt ceiling deal to understand the discrepancies in President Obama's speech acts across time. After presenting CNN news footage reporting that Congress reached a debt ceiling deal including "one trillion in immediate spending cuts, a debt limit increase of 2.1 trillion, and a bipartisan committee to agree on another 1.5 trillion in cuts in spending," Stewart interjects. He insists, "There must be revenue increases in the compromise because I was told just how crucial that was to this negotiation by, let's call him an unnamed senior Whitehouse official." The segment then cuts to a sequence of redacted footage of President Obama, the "unnamed senior Whitehouse official," speaking to the importance of increasing government revenues through higher taxes:

Obama: We can't close our deficit with cuts alone What we have said is part of a broad plan should have revenues Revenues would come from the people who can most afford them Serious budget cuts balanced by some new revenues If you don't have revenues, it means you are putting more of a burden on the people who can least afford it.

Stewart shows President Obama's expressed commitment to financial reform through increased tax revenues. Stewart argues that in order to preserve vital social programs, the debt ceiling deal clearly required raising revenues through increasing tax revenues. However, *TDS* then cuts to redacted footage indicating otherwise. A series of news clips rolls, each *summarizing evidence* that indicates that no revenue increases were included in the deal.

Honing in on incongruity, *TDS* finally shows the following news clip from after the debt ceiling deal was reached, exposing an instance of President Obama engaged in strategic communication:

Obama: I want to thank the people. It's been your letters, calls, and tweets that have compelled Washington to act.

Stewart: I wanna stop you there. You're not pinning this turd on us. The last time I checked, the buck stopped with you, not the twitterverse.

TDS highlights incongruous presidential messages by arranging the redacted footage so that the president's contradicting press statements speak for themselves. When President Obama's conflicting messages are viewed sequentially and accompanied by the redacted summary of news media reports, then the audience gains perspective from the incongruity of his messages. The audience can see that President Obama did not gain adequate support for his original position, yet the president uses the press coverage to gain good publicity rather than address the continued need for tax reform. The audience thus gains perspective regarding the strategic motivations underlying the president's expression of gratitude. Therefore, the audience gets a different perspective that conveys an alternative meaning not explicitly stated by the president. Doing so reminds the audience that the deal the president thanked the public for does not align with the legislative agenda the president supported just days earlier. In so doing, *TDS* holds the president accountable to his stated commitment to reforming the financial system.

Stewart further exposes incongruity through redaction in a second instance of *cross-examining* the president. As this research has already argued, the weeks preceding the debt ceiling vote made evident the rigid partisanship dominating political discourses between Democrats and Republicans and the more specific conflict between Republicans in the House of Representatives and the Senate. In contrast, throughout much of the coverage of the debt ceiling

issue, President Obama conveyed a pragmatic insistence upon compromise, which arguably elevated his credibility. However, refusing to let the president evade his prior participation in ideologically rigid voting patterns, in segment D Stewart prompts, “Now why would the Republicans get the impression that they could play silly politics with something like our credit rating? Because in 2006, the President—then a freshman senator—voted against raising the debt ceiling. And why did he do that?” Illustrating the incongruity between Senator Obama and President Obama, *TDS* cuts to the following footage featuring President Obama’s explanation:

Obama: That was just a, uh, example of a new senator making what is a political vote as opposed to doing what is important for the country. I’m the first one to acknowledge it.

This *cross-examination* exemplifies another pointed critique of Obama’s participation in strategic communication and additionally exposes how ubiquitously strategic communication practices penetrate political processes.

However, the interrogation of Obama’s voting record also proffers a potentially positive new perspective on strategic communication, because it concludes with President Obama publically accepting responsibility for his part in the ideological rigidity and gamesmanship which dominate much of today’s politics. Public acknowledgement for his part in the perpetuation of political gamesmanship potentially improves the conditions for political discourses because it establishes that political gamesmanship is happening, that the gamesmanship threatens democracy, and that it needs to change in order to achieve what is important for the country as a whole as opposed to what is important for a relatively small and elite group of political actors. Furthermore, targeting President Obama for interrogation lends credence to Stewart’s claim in a 2003 interview with Bruce Fretts of *Entertainment Weekly* that, contrary to some criticisms of *TDS*, the show functions less from a partisan point of view and

more from “the point of view . . . that we’re passionately opposed to bullshit” (as cited in Jones 2010, 111).

Summarizing evidence.

Summarizing evidence performs differently in *TDS*’s debt ceiling coverage than the previous two types of redaction strategies because it critiques strategy and offers new meaning in conjunction with an additional mode of criticism. In other words, whereas *interrogating multiple witnesses* and *cross-examining the defendant* rely solely upon juxtaposing footage to expose incongruency, *summarizing evidence* instead relies upon an additional mode of critique, typically Stewart’s commentary, arranged in conjunction with the *summary of evidence* to provide new perspective. The case below illustrates how this type of redaction facilitates *TDS*’s critique of news media’s engagement in strategic game framing of political news by giving undue authority to polling data.

The media’s practice of framing politics as a strategic game often positions the public as spectators to a political contest, and *TDS summarizes evidence* to expose the media’s failure to report extensively, clearly, and offer information that is useful for enlightened understanding of a variety of values and concerns which underlie differing political positions. In segment I, *TDS* creates perspective by incongruity when it calls attention to the media’s reliance upon the ostensibly “objective” information provided by polls, even when that information is unclear. After critiquing the Republicans’ deployment of the term “job creators” as a euphemism for corporations and the wealthiest members of the upper class, Stewart criticizes the press for failing to provide in-depth coverage of the news:

Stewart (*ironically*): Too bad for the politicians that we have a vibrant and focused media culture in this country. Dedicated to battling obfuscation and bringing clarity.

The following *summary of evidence* then plays in response to Stewart’s prompt, revealing a nonsensical, incongruent set of statistics from various news sources that does little to promote public political knowledge:

Only 20-25% of Americans want a deal that is only spending cuts Almost 70 % of Americans want a deal that includes both spending cuts and revenue increases An overwhelming 55% of Americans want nothing to do with the tax hike and the debt deal The vast majority of Americans want tax hikes to be part of the debt ceiling deal 11 % of Americans say that increasing government spending will be good for the economy Americans by almost a 2 to 1 margin want their congressman to vote against raising the debt ceiling There are now more Americans who say “Ok, yeah, raise it, we understand the implications to the economy”. . . . Just 24% of Americans support lifting the debt limit 53% are in favor of voting against raising the debt ceiling.

Arranged in sequence, this set of redacted statements *summarizing evidence* highlights the limitations of news media practices which report the news in terms of a strategic game in which the focus is on winning and losing and gaining advantage in the polls. One weakness of this approach to reporting the news is that it does little to build public knowledge about policies and issues. Additionally, it potentially detracts for the public’s trust in the competence and credibility of political processes, and in this case, public distrust of government was already heightened due to the partisanship that dominated much of the 2011 debt ceiling negotiations. In the subsequent chapter, this spiral of strategic communication and strategy framing will be fleshed out more fully.

The closing statement.

Like *summarizing evidence*, the fourth type of redaction strategy, *the closing statement*, also works in conjunction with Stewart’s commentary to critique political strategy and highlight incongruity. The following example of a *closing statement* is a mash-up that, in combination with Stewart’s commentary, offers an alternative perspective that criticizes the strategy and

ideological rigidity underlying the extreme partisan positions taken by political actors involved in the debt ceiling negotiation.

After the debt ceiling hike was approved, *TDS* criticized Democrats in Congress and President Obama for failing to secure higher revenues through increasing taxes on the richest American and reforming the corporate tax code. Not surprisingly, Stewart expressed outrage at the Tea Party's apparent dominance of the debt ceiling debate. In segment P, Stewart illuminates incongruence in the Tea Party's post-deal discourse:

Stewart: Well, it looks like the Democrats got hosed! Trillions in spending cuts, no revenue increases, go ahead Tea Party, put on your hats, play your pipes, and dance the minuet. Tea party like it's 1799.

In response, the following mash-up of testimony from Republicans followed by commentary from Stewart gives new meaning to political gamesmanship:

Joe Walsh: I can't vote for this.

Mike Lee: We haven't gotten what we need.

Ron Johnson: This is totally inadequate.

Tom Graves: Not something that I can support.

Reporter: Congresswoman Michelle Bachman, she's voting against it

Connie Mack: I'm going to vote against it.

The mash-up of ideologically rigid responses to the debt ceiling deal reveals a level of unwillingness to negotiate that Stewart challenges when he interrogates the Tea Party members' dissatisfaction with the vote in the following statement:

Stewart: What the f--- tea partiers? You control less than one half of one chamber of Congress and yet have somehow convinced everybody that they've gotta slash trillions in spending because of the "deficit crisis." Many Republicans supported extending the largest contributing policy piece to our deficit, the Bush tax cuts What are you still angry about? Yes, government still exists. We still have traffic lights. We're sorry. Not

everybody defines freedom as the ability to not pay taxes. Government isn't perfect, but some people wish it was better, not gone.

Stewart's commentary identifies the incongruity in the reality that many of the political actors who supported the legislation extending the Bush era tax cuts were the same politicians professing outrage for the size of the nation's debt, which they then extended as a reason to legitimate their refusal to sign the debt ceiling legislation. Further, the segment urges political leaders to take responsibility for making government "better," not smaller. Finally, it argues that *TDS* values social equality above "freedom" from taxation, and by making the distinction, *TDS* contributes to working through the process of identifying the key values upon which ideological positions take shape.

In summary, each of Jones's four types of redaction strategies is utilized by *TDS* to arrange footage of news in a way that presents fresh perspective and challenges both President Obama and Congress to practice greater reflexivity and a more consistent commitment to bipartisanship. By redacting news footage, *TDS* challenges strategic communication practices among politicians and the press. Furthermore, by presenting its arguments through redaction, *TDS* challenges its audience to scrutinize the news in order to gain new perspective on strategic discourses.

Summary

This chapter has detailed the ways in which redaction offers alternative perspectives on strategic communication. Rhetorical analysis of redaction strategies has demonstrated perspective by incongruity's potential for altering the framework from which viewers interpret strategic communication. This research thus supports the argument that *TDS* performs a useful interrogation of political culture because it demonstrates how *TDS* functions to give us new perspectives that might not enter the public sphere otherwise. In addition, it has clarified the

utility of the application of communication theories for understanding the complexities of communication in political life. However, this research is limited to describing *TDS*'s redaction strategies for satiric critique. In order gain greater understanding of *TDS*'s potential impact on political engagement, the following chapter will turn to an analysis of the show's framing strategies.

III: Framing “Armadebton 2011”

Whereas the previous chapter highlighted the ways in which *TDS*'s performance of satiric critique through redaction may serve a useful watchdog function for democracy, this chapter is an analysis of the show's framing strategies that considers how *TDS*'s framing practices may constrain audiences' interpretations of politics and contribute to strategic political learning. Strategic political learning warrants concern because it may contribute to distrust of politicians and political processes (Capella and Jamieson, 1997). The primary objectives of the following analysis are to expose the extent to which *TDS*'s coverage of the debt ceiling negotiations engages strategy, game, and deliberative frames and to evaluate whether *TDS* potentially contributes to public distrust of political systems.

This thesis has already reviewed extensive political communication and framing scholarship discussing the increasing presence of strategy framing in political news coverage (e.g., Aalberg et al. 2012; Jackson 2011; Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Cappella and Jamieson 1997; and Patterson 1993). According to Capella and Jamieson (1997), strategy news frames implicate self-interested motivation for political actions. Further, because strategy frames now dominate political news, the *strategy schema* has become the American public's dominant schema for interpreting political news (Capella and Jamieson 1997). This is considered a detriment to democracy because strategic interpretations of politics diminish the public's perception of its ability influence political outcomes by emphasizing that politics consist of strategic actions among political leaders over which the public has little control.

This analysis applies Aalberg et al.'s (2012) *strategic game macro frame* to *TDS*'s coverage of the debt ceiling debate, which delineates *game* and *strategy micro frames*. In review, while the game frame emphasizes winning and losing, public opinion polls, approval

ratings from particular interest groups, and/or election or policy outcomes, the strategy frame emphasizes interpretations of politicians’ motives, strategies and tactics for achieving policy goals, how politicians campaign, and metacoverage of the press’s political news coverage. The adoption of Aalberg et al.’s strategic game macro frame comprised of the strategy and game micro frames adds greater conceptual clarity to this research and informs a more precise discussion of the potential framing effects related to *TDS*’s political news coverage. Below, Table 2 outlines the distinct dimensions of the strategy, game, and deliberative frames.

Table 2: Frame Dimensions

Strategy Frame	Game Frame	Deliberative Frame
1. interpretations of candidates’ or parties’ motives for political actions and positions	1. coverage of who is winning and losing	1. justifications for ideas or claims expressed
2. coverage of campaign strategies and tactics for achieving political goals	2. coverage of public opinion polls	2. rebuttals that refer to and present counterarguments for specific ideas
3. coverage of how candidates or parties campaign	3. commentary regarding approval or disapproval from interests groups or publics	3. the representation of conflicting positions
4. commentary on politicians’ leadership style and integrity, including discussion of their personal traits	4. speculation about potential policy or election outcomes	4. civility in speech, or the absence of hot button language
		5. the presence of a response by one speaker to another speaker

Framing on *TDS*

TDS engages dimensions of both strategic game macro framing and deliberative framing in its coverage of the debt ceiling negotiation. Strategy framing is the most pervasive, deliberative framing ranks second in frequency, and game framing is the least utilized in the debt

ceiling segments. The following discussion describes each frame’s deployment in the segments according to each of the dimensions outlined in Table 2. Below, Table 3 summarizes each segment’s dominant, secondary, and tertiary frames. After I describe the frequency with which each frame occurs and provide examples to illustrate their presence, I will subsequently discuss the potential framing effect *TDS* may contribute to political discourses among audience members based upon the framing themes that emerge in the segments.

Table 3: Dominant, Secondary and Tertiary Frames by *TDS* Segment.

Segment	Dominant Frame	Secondary Frame	Tertiary Frame
A	Deliberative	Game	None
B	Game	Strategy	Deliberative
C	Game	None	None
D	Strategy	Game	None
E	Deliberative	Strategy	None
F	Strategy	Game	None
G	Strategy	Deliberative	Game
H	Strategy	Deliberative	None
I	Deliberative	Strategy	None
J	Strategy	Deliberative/Game	None
K	Strategy	Deliberative	Game
L	Strategy	Deliberative	Game
M	Deliberative	Strategy	None
N	Strategy	Game	Deliberative
O	Deliberative	Strategy	None
P	Game	Strategy/Deliberative	None
Q	Strategy	Deliberative	None
R	Strategy	Game	None
S	Strategy	Game	Deliberative

Strategy Framing on *TDS*

The strategy frame is the dominant frame in fifty-eight percent of the *TDS* segments covering the debt ceiling debate. Additionally, the strategy frame is present in ninety percent of

the segments and averages 2.6 appearances per segment, which makes it the most pervasive of the three frames. Of the five dimensions that make up the strategy frame, the most frequently engaged is an emphasis upon how political actors conducted the policy campaign. Sixteen statements, or thirty-three percent of the instances of strategy framing, emphasize how political actors campaign. Examples of strategy-framed statements focusing on how politicians conduct campaigns are,

Stewart: The negotiations thus far seem to have brought out the worst in our political system. (segment J)

and

Stewart: The president isn't alone in escalating the rhetoric in this fight. (segment G)

By focusing consistently upon how politicians campaign, whether for office or for a policy, *TDS*'s debt ceiling coverage provides a strong strategic emphasis.

Among the remaining dimensions of the strategy frame, an emphasis on politicians' leadership style and personality traits ranked second in frequency, occurring fourteen times and making up twenty-nine percent of the instances of strategy framing. Examples of an emphasis on leadership style and personality traits follow:

Stewart: I'm just saying that *this congress is the equivalent of a skunk with its head in a jar of peanut butter*. (segment K; emphasis added)

and

Stewart: To the outsider, *our country's leaders' inability to compromise* seems inexplicable" (segment G; emphasis added).

In the two examples given above, Stewart's criticism clearly emphasizes problems related to leadership rather than problems related to the actual issue of raising the debt ceiling. This shows how strategy framing detracts from substantive learning by distracting audiences with the personalization of politics.

Ranking third in frequency among dimensions of the strategy frame, statements emphasizing politicians' strategies and tactics for achieving their political goals were present in eight cases and thus made up sixteen percent of the strategy frames. An example of the strategy and tactic dimension is *TDS*'s coverage of an adversarial exchange between Obama and Representative Eric Canter in which Obama declares to Canter "Don't call my bluff," and then Stewart proceeds with the following commentary:

Stewart: "Don't call my bluff" kind of implies . . . that the economic collapse of our country *is a chip the president will play or not play given the relative strength of his hand*" (segment F; emphasis added).

Comments such as these direct attention to the objectives of individual political leaders as if their individual political goals were the central concern related to the issue, rather than directing attention to how the public is affected by the issue. This dimension illustrates another way in which the personalization of politics eclipses substantive coverage in the political news environment.

Finally, statements interpreting politician's motives occurred seven times, making up fourteen percent of the strategy frames. An example of the interpretation of motives follows in Stewart's attention to Senator Mitch McConnell's motives for taking his position in the debt ceiling negotiation:

Stewart: Here's Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell laying out his deeply cynical solution.

McConnell: I would ask that we pass legislation giving the president the authority to request of us an increase in the debt ceiling that would take us past the end of his term . . .

Stewart: (*whispers, aside*) That's not the cynical part.

McConnell: that would be subject to a resolution of disapproval. That resolution would then go to the president and he could sign it or veto it.

Stewart: See what he did there? He cleverly split the Senate's responsibility in two, abdicating the unpopular "doing it" part to the president, but retaining the more politically popular "complaining about the guy who had to do it." (segment G).

By emphasizing that McConnell's motivations reflect partisan interests, which he expresses through open strategic communication, rather than an interest in making the decision that accommodates the public's best interests, *TDS* adds to the perception that political action is motivated by politicians' self interests. This again detracts from audiences' perception of political efficacy, or the ability to effectively influence politics, by emphasizing that political actors are not motivated by the public's interest so much as by their party's interests, and this demonstrates a real complexity in the debate over whether *TDS* is a cynical or realistic interpretation of politics. McConnell's commentary openly communicates political strategy, and as a watchdog, *TDS* criticizes that strategy. At the same time, however, *TDS*'s emphasis on the strategy may undermine public trust in political institutions (arguably rightly so, in this specific case of open strategic communication), and thus undercut democracy by giving the impression of reducing politics to individual politicians' strategies.

Metacoverage was the least frequently engaged dimension of the strategy frame. Just two instances, or four percent of the strategy frames, critique how the press covered the debt ceiling debate. In one instance already described in chapter two, *TDS* deployed metacoverage to critique the news media's reliance upon incongruent polling data, and in another, metacoverage was engaged to critique the news media's use of hyperbole. The infrequency of metacoverage's deployment in the nineteen segments studied herein shows that *TDS*'s satiric critique of the debt ceiling negotiation more consistently focuses upon politicians than members of the press.

Deliberative Framing on *TDS*

The secondary frame for *TDS*'s debt ceiling coverage is the deliberative frame. The deliberative model for political news dominates twenty-six percent of the segments. It is present in seventy-nine percent of the segments and averages 2.05 appearances per segment. Of the five dimensions included in the deliberative frame, responsiveness was the one most frequently utilized. In fact, instances illustrating the dimension of responsiveness outnumber any of the other dimensions across the three news models measured in this study, making it the most pervasive frame dimension in all of the debt ceiling coverage. Nineteen instances, or forty-nine percent, of the deliberative frame's engagement in the debt ceiling coverage illustrate responsiveness. Responsiveness is exemplified when portions of Democrats' position statements and portions of Republicans' responses are juxtaposed for the audience to scrutinize side-by-side. Responsiveness is accommodated well by *TDS*'s practice of redaction, which was the subject of chapter two.

Rebuttals ranked second in frequency of use among the five dimensions of the deliberative news model, occurring twelve times and comprising thirty percent of the instances of deliberative framing. Obama's reference to and argument against Republicans' position in the following quote demonstrates a rebuttal:

Obama: Republicans in Congress are insisting on . . . a cuts-only approach. An approach that doesn't ask the wealthiest Americans or biggest corporations to pay any more at all. How can we ask a student to pay more for college before we ask hedge fund managers to stop paying taxes at a lower rate than their secretaries? (segment L)

Rebuttals are "considered to be of higher deliberative value" than simple statements affirming an opposing idea, because rebuttals actually acknowledge the position that they oppose within their counterarguments (Wessler 2008, 11). Redaction practices also accommodate the rebuttal

dimension of deliberative framing by putting opposing political actors into conversation with one another.

The expression of conflicting ideas was the third-most-deployed dimension of deliberative framing, occurring six times and making up fifteen percent of the deliberative frames. Wessler (2008) suggested that journalists can contribute to public deliberation by providing the public with conflicting perspectives on an issue. Two examples of statements outlining conflicting perspectives are the following declarations:

Stewart: Democrats want tax increases, Republicans want spending cuts. (segment D)
and

Stewart: Republicans will never do a short-term deal, especially not one with tax increases, and Democrats won't do one without tax increases" (segment K).

While the above statements illustrate the presence of conflicting perspectives, some deliberative theorists (e.g., Gastil 2008; Simon and Xenos 2008) argue that media needs to go further and actually identify the tensions between opposing perspectives. This is a topic that will be addressed in more detail when considering suggestions for future research in the concluding chapter.

Finally, justifications and civility ranked low in use in this sample of segments. Justifications occurred twice, which made up less than one percent of the deliberative frames. Civility, defined by Wessler (2008) as the absence of inflammatory speech, was not a dimension deployed in the series. This is likely due to the comic intentions that Stewart claims for his satire, which often rely upon deliberately crude and occasionally offensive commentary. This also illustrates a problem Wessler identifies as typically associated with debate-style political news programs, which is that "they seem to foster deliberative as well as disrespectful 'interaction' . . . at the same time" (16). Ironically, it was a lack of civility that was also the subject of Stewart's

infamous critique of *Crossfire* cited earlier. It is likely, however, that if this study were expanded to include *TDS*'s interview segments, the opportunity to find examples of both justifications and civility would increase significantly. Both prior research (e.g., Baym 2007) and my own preliminary investigations indicate that the interview segments on *TDS* may frequently exemplify deliberative communication.

Game Framing on *TDS*

Lastly, the game frame is dominant in only sixteen percent of the segments. Still, it is present in sixty-eight percent of the segments and averages .9 appearances per segment. The two dimensions of the game frame that are most commonly utilized by *TDS* are an emphasis on winning and losing and speculation regarding outcomes. Each makes up thirty-three percent of the instances of the game frame, occurring six times. Winning and losing are emphasized in statements such as,

Stewart: Well, the Democrats got hosed! (segment P)

and

Stewart: I think both parties have already lost Florida. (segment G)

Speculation about outcomes occurs in statements such as:

Jason Jones: If the conversation continues this way, we could very well hit the national bulls**t ceiling. (segment J)

and

Stewart: While many of you enjoyed your weekend, our country moved closer to self-inflicted economic collapse. (segment K)

Focusing on winning and losing and speculating about outcomes clearly enables *TDS* to create comic value in the above examples, which aligns with the show's intention to entertain.

Although this type of framing for entertainment does not necessarily decrease political

engagement, some scholars have expressed concern that it may artificially inflate audiences' perception of their levels of political knowledge while actually offering very little substance (Baumgartner and Morris, 2006).

Interest groups' (dis)approval and polling data were the two least frequently engaged dimensions of the game frame. Emphasis on the approval or disapproval of specific interest groups is present in four segments, or twenty-two percent of the game frames, and is exemplified by *TDS*'s redacted montage of members of the Tea Party making press statements declaring their disapproval in response to the final debt ceiling deal, which was described in the previous chapter. Finally, just two instances, or eleven percent of the game frames, emphasized the importance of opinion polls. An example of emphasizing the importance of polling data for reflecting public opinion follows:

Stewart: Can the super committee . . . save Congress from Congress's arch enemy, the American people?

CNN: New polling numbers out. Looks like the country thinks that those in Washington have acted like a bunch of spoiled children.

Wolf Blitzer: A CNN poll shows 77 % say elected officials who dealt with the debt crisis have acted like spoiled children.

Brian Williams: pollsters tell us that Americans are using words like "ridiculous," "stupid," "disgusting," "childish," "disappointing," and "a joke" to describe their elected representatives. (segment R)

Typically, however, *TDS* is more likely to parody the news media's use of polling data in a way that aligns more closely with the strategy frame's metacoverage dimension. In other words, rather than actually including polling data for informative value, *TDS* is more likely to make fun of the media's reliance upon polls in one of its parodies of the "real" news media.

The Strategic Game Macro Frame on *TDS*

When coding for Aalberg et al.'s (2012) strategic macro frame, the framing evidence changes slightly. The strategic game macro frame is dominant in segments in which the strategy and game frames rank as the dominant and secondary frames and the deliberative frame is coded as tertiary or absent, but not dominant or secondary. Six out of the nineteen segments are dominated by the strategic game macro frame, and they are concentrated in the first one-third and final one-third of the segments. The strategic game macro frame is present in eleven out of nineteen, or fifty-eight percent, of the segments, which means that eleven of the segments contained dimensions of both the strategy and game micro frames. Importantly, the mere presence of the strategic game macro frame does not necessarily lead to predominantly strategic learning. For example, if audiences are exposed to segments which have a dominant deliberative frame, a secondary strategy frame, and a tertiary game frame, then they may learn more substantive than strategic information about politics from that coverage, even though it contains dimensions of the strategic game macro frame.

Arrangement

Two important aspects of *TDS*'s debt ceiling coverage's arrangement related to framing are the use of graphics within the segments and the order in which frames appear throughout the series. A complete analysis of *TDS*'s use of graphics is the subject for another study, but this section will briefly address the use of graphics in the segments. Then it will discuss the order in which frames appear in the series.

Graphics

Matthes (2009) exposes a problematic trend of altogether ignoring graphics in framing analyses throughout the communication literature. Although *TDS*'s use of visual aids in coverage

of the debt ceiling often has greater comic than informative value, this discussion addresses how the graphics employed by *TDS* may buttress the personalization of politics in *TDS*'s satiric coverage of "Armadebton 2011." First, the most obvious connection is *TDS*'s redaction theme of visually juxtaposing competing political actors, which may contribute to audiences interpreting political processes as battles fought between elite actors. For example, some graphics reduce an entire day's worth of political negotiations into a single image juxtaposing two political opponents. This occurs in segment A by juxtaposing images of Representatives Boehner and Reid as Stewart quips, "Is there anything you guys agree on?" Again, in segment F a graphic juxtaposes President Obama and Representative Canter as Stewart narrates a day of volatile negotiations between Congress and President Obama. These graphics emphasizing the personalization of politics are also supporting the strategic game macro frame's pervasiveness in the political news environment by promoting the idea that political processes are competitions between political actors, rather than complex negotiations of values and facts related to policy and issues.

In other cases, graphics are used to mock political actors' personality traits, thereby sustaining a strategy frame for politics. For example, in segment D Stewart compares Congress to petulant children and Obama to a father-figure:

Stewart: You know, you get the sense that Obama's the first president in history that begins every press conference with a heavy sigh. I guess he had no idea that having children would be this hard. Wait, I'm being told that peas mentioned were not a metaphor. Apparently during negotiations, Speaker of the House Boehner was literally not eating his peas.

At the same time, a graphic of Boehner grimacing at an imposed plate of peas appears onscreen, receiving laughter from the audience. This use of graphics appears to encourage strategic,

cynical political learning rather than substantive or deliberative political learning by criticizing and mocking political actors' personality traits.

Order of Frames

In addition to the importance of graphic material in the segments, the order in which frames appear throughout the series of segments is also important. An analysis of the overall arrangement of the frames reveals that although the strategy frame dominates *TDS*'s debt ceiling debate coverage in the majority of segments, the only two segments in which it is absent are the first and third of the series. Additionally, the strategy frame is not the dominant frame in any of the initial three debt ceiling segments. Rather, the deliberative frame is the dominant frame in segment A, and the game frame is dominant in segments B and C. The deliberative and game frames' dominance in segments A, B, and C along with the strategy frames' absence from segments A and C indicates that *TDS*'s opening coverage of the debt ceiling debate contextualizes the issue with considerably less emphasis given to political strategy than is demonstrated in subsequent coverage. Beyond the initial three segments, however, political strategy emerged as the dominant emphasis of *TDS*'s coverage. In fact, the strategy frame is dominant in sixty-nine percent of the remaining sixteen segments.

One possible explanation for the increasingly strategic nature of the series over time is that *TDS*'s coverage of the debt ceiling reflects the increasingly strategic nature of the debt ceiling debate as it persisted. Another explanation for the strategy frames' dominance is that it appears as a factor of the increasing use of the strategic game macro frame in the traditional news environment that *TDS* parodies. However, because the results of this analysis have already demonstrated comparatively low levels of metacoverage, the former is more likely to be the case than the latter. In any case, the strategy frame's dominance in fifty-eight percent of the segments

in the entire sample and sixty-nine percent of the latter sixteen segments makes evident *TDS*'s tendency to frame the debt ceiling debate in terms of political strategy. The potential consequence, according to Capella and Jamieson's (1997) schematic activation hypothesis, is that audiences will retain strategic knowledge about politics and therefore develop distrust in the political system that will be reactivated and reinforced by future consumption of strategy-framed news. The following discussion therefore considers *TDS*'s potential framing effect in greater detail.

Implications for Audiences' Political Attitudes

Audiences receive information framed in a variety of ways on *TDS*. Nearly all of the *TDS* segments utilized some combination of strategy, game, and deliberative frames. Ninety-five percent of segments deployed combinations of at least two of the three frames, and forty-two percent of the segments combined elements from all three frames. None of the segments are exclusively deliberatively framed, and none are exclusively strategy framed. Only one segment, C, contained just one of the three frames, the game frame, and that was likely due to the fact that the segment is significantly shorter than the rest. Deliberative and game frames were equally likely to occur as secondary frames, with each making up thirty-five percent of the category, and tertiary frames, with each making up fifty percent of the category. The strategy frame was present as a secondary frame in thirty percent of the segments, but it was never present as a tertiary frame. Overall, audiences to *TDS*'s debt ceiling coverage receive high exposure to the strategic game macro frame.

However, the deliberative frame's presence in fifteen of the segments contributes significantly to *TDS*'s coverage as well. As of yet, the field of communication lacks empirical evidence of deliberative media's direct impact on public deliberation. This research therefore

illustrates a need for future research to consider how media frames contribute to public discussion. Even if audiences to *TDS* are exposed to deliberative dimensions of political news coverage, in every case they are also exposed to either or both potentially distracting information from game frames and cynical information from strategy frames. If some elements of the strategic game macro frame are always present alongside of deliberative frames, then substantive political information and strategic political information may remain in tension with one another on *TDS*. Therefore, audiences to *TDS* will, theoretically, both gain substantive political knowledge and develop political cynicism as a result of exposure to the show.

In the case of coverage of the 2011 debt ceiling negotiations, it is likely that *TDS*'s emphasis on political strategy was a result of a combination of the adversarial tone of the policy campaign and *TDS*'s production choices. One way of getting at the answer to the question of whether *TDS* is demonstrating political cynicism or realism would be to perform a similar examination of *TDS*'s coverage of a less ideologically divisive policy debate. Another way of approaching the question of whether *TDS* demonstrates cynicism or realism would be to examine a broader sample of news reports from several more traditional news sources from across the political spectrum in order to determine whether they, too, observed and reported similar strategic patterns in the news. Next, the concluding chapter will turn to a discussion of the findings of this study and imagine further possibilities for future research.

IV: Conclusion

This research has examined *TDS*'s redaction and framing strategies in order to determine whether the show potentially improves political communication in the public sphere or undermines citizens' engagement in democracy. I used qualitative methods to perform a rhetorical analysis of *TDS*'s redaction strategies and quantitative methods to perform a content analysis of *TDS*'s framing strategies. My rhetorical analysis of redaction strategies indicates that there are ways in which *TDS* potentially strengthens democracy, yet my framing analysis indicates that there are ways in which *TDS* may undermine the public's potential for meaningful political engagement. *TDS* may strengthen democracy by serving a watchdog purpose and broadening the diversity of perspectives in the political public sphere, yet its coverage of politics may undermine democracy by emphasizing the strategic motivations for political actions, thereby decreasing some audience members' trust in government and intention to participate in politics. I begin this discussion by explaining the ways in which redaction enables *TDS* to perform a watchdog function and diversify political discourses, and then I turn to the ways in which *TDS*'s strategy framing practices might undermine democratic engagement. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this study and make suggestions for future research.

How *TDS*'s Redaction Strategies Improve Political Communication

This rhetorical analysis has shown that redaction is a strategy *TDS* utilizes for deconstructing strategic political debates and contributing alternative meanings for instances of strategic communication to the political public sphere. *TDS*'s deconstruction of political discourses through redaction serves democracy by holding political actors and press members accountable to the public they serve (Baym 2005; Painter and Hodges 2010). Watchdogs are essential to the information environment from which the members of the public gain the

knowledge necessary to form political positions (Gastil 2008; Trappel and Maniglio 2009). Beyond the performance of a watchdog role, redaction further enables *TDS* to create new meanings for the political discourses which emerged in the debt ceiling negotiation, potentially broadening the diversity of discourses in the political public sphere. This contribution is an important one, because democracy is improved by the inclusion of voices representing dissenting, conflicting, and agonistic parties (Ivie 2004; Asen 2000; Guttman 2000; Mouffe 1999; Fraser 1990; Hohendahl and Silberman 1979; Dewey 1931). Therefore, when *TDS* uses redaction to challenge the status quo offered by traditional political news sources or officials, it supports the democratic ideal of engaging diverse perspectives in the public sphere, though in a non-traditional context. Some communication theorists have begun to address the possibilities for mediated political engagement, and in the next section, I will use their work to elaborate upon how *TDS* contributes to political discourses.

Promoting Scrutiny on the *Public Screen*

This study of *TDS* is indicative of the interdependence of media and political systems. Current scholarship attempts to reconcile the expansion of media systems with the possibility for citizenship, which requires modification to Habermas's (1989) public sphere theory. One important theoretical contribution relevant to *TDS* is DeLuca and Peebles's (2002) model of the *public screen*, which emphasizes the symbiosis between media and politics by taking into account the media's emphasis on spectacle and image-based narratives, which *TDS* frequently demonstrates. DeLuca and Peebles suggest that these are realities of politics and citizenship in today's mediated political environment. Their model of the public screen is a modification to Habermas's model of the public sphere that attempts to account for postmodernity's changed media landscape while maintaining the modernists' value for the principle of citizenship. Their

introduction of the metaphor of the public screen is a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, traditional Habermasian public sphere theory.

DeLuca and Peebles explain that their variation on the traditional public sphere is useful for reconsidering today's citizens' relationships to politics because,

As a normative ideal, the public sphere promotes as unquestioned universal goods several deeply problematic notions: consensus, openness, dialogue, rationality, and civility/decorum. As a supplement, we want to introduce the public screen as a metaphor for thinking about the places of politics and the possibilities of citizenship in our present moment. (131)

DeLuca and Peebles's argument is that image-based stories and emphasis on spectacle are realities of performing politics and citizenship in the contemporary media environment, and if we fail to consider how engagement with media impacts the experience of citizenship, then we ignore significant aspects of how individuals both gain and potentially act upon political knowledge. Likewise, Castells (2008) suggests that the new, global public sphere depends upon the mass media system for information. Castells conceptualizes the media system as a communication network that informs civil society, which arises when governmental institutions fail to address consequential social problems and uses media to generate awareness and support for its causes. The above supplements to the metaphor of the public sphere avoid Habermas's static notions of the public, politics, and citizenship and enable media and political communication scholars to consider how mediated, non-traditional political discourses, such as those produced by *TDS*, contribute to citizenship.

The *televisual sphere of politics*.

Extending from DeLuca and Peebles's (2002) public screen and Habermas's public sphere, Baym (2007) argues that *TDS* represents a variation on the political public sphere that he conceptualizes as the "*televisual sphere*, [which is] an intermediary notion between Habermas's

modernist ideal of a rational-critical public sphere and a postmodern conception of the image-based public screen” (95). Baym suggests that *TDS* illustrates this confluence of public screen and public sphere by demonstrating political news coverage’s tendency to highlight spectacle while it nonetheless argues for improved political communication. By using redaction to critique political spectacle surrounding the debt ceiling negotiation, *TDS* adds to the spectacle, but it is spectacle that is derived from existing news coverage that the producers identify as necessitating critique due the departure it represents from Habermas’s rational-critical ideal speech situation.

Related to Baym’s argument is Norris’s (2000) optimistic perspective on television’s potential to motivate political engagement. Contrary to Putnam’s (2000) and Postman’s (1985) pessimistic accounts of television’s negative impact on citizenship, Norris describes television as an activating force for people who are politically engaged. She argues that, contrary to the “media malaise” theory Putnam and Postman adopt, expanding media technologies and systems actually activate and support political engagement. Her research offers evidence that individuals who rely on television media for political information tend to be more knowledgeable and more engaged in political processes than individuals who do not. Norris proposes that the relationship between citizens and political media is “a virtuous circle” in which attention to political media leads to greater participation in politics, and greater participation in politics leads citizens to commit more attention to politics in the media.

Summary

This study has found that, through redaction strategies, *TDS* offers a critique of politics that effectively conveys perspective by incongruity to the public through the medium of television, which emphasizes spectacle and narrative reasoning. In so doing, the show exemplifies how non-traditional news potentially contributes significant information to

audiences' political knowledge. However, whether or not *TDS*'s contribution of perspective by incongruity to the political public sphere leads to actual social change depends at least in part on whether the audience "has a place to go and a means to get there" (Dow 1994, 239), and this may be a significant obstacle that both traditional and non-traditional news media systems must overcome if they are to contribute meaningfully to the public's political engagement. The following discussion will address the ways in which *TDS* may in fact create obstacles for public engagement that challenge democracy and then will suggest how they might be overcome.

How *TDS*'s Framing Strategies Potentially Undermine Democracy

This research reveals that the strategic game macro frame pervades *TDS*'s coverage of the debt ceiling debate. Generally, political communication research has shown consistent evidence that strategy frames dominate US mainstream political news (Valentino et al. 2001; Jackson 2011; Farnsworth and Lichter 2011), and since *TDS* is in the business of reappropriating traditional news networks' footage to generate much of its content, it is easy to see how *TDS* reiterates the broader media systems' emphasis on political strategy. The potential problems with the strategy and game frames related to reduced democratic engagement are that they may, at best, distract media audiences from the substance of issues and, at worst, cause audiences to distrust politicians and government and therefore disengage from political processes. Notably, *TDS*'s appeal to emotion through satire may make an even stronger impression on audience's memory than traditional news, because research has shown that messages containing information that arouses emotion are more likely to be stored in long-term memory (Lang, 2000; Bandura 1986).

If strategy framing potentially leads to cynicism among some audiences, then *TDS* could contribute to political disengagement among those audiences. In this way, the media malaise

theory could apply to *TDS*'s potential to impact some audiences. Therefore, it is reasonable for Baumgartner and Morris (2006) and Hart and Hartelius (2007) to express concern about the so-called "Daily Show effect" of cynicism on audiences who do not already possess strong political knowledge or have a personal or family history of consistently voting, because these audiences may be turned off from politics based upon the strategy-framed information *TDS* provides. However, it is equally reasonable to be concerned about the political climate in which *TDS* exists. It may be most optimistic and productive to propose ways that the show might better equip audiences for democratic engagement, particularly because it is so popular among youthful audiences. Therefore, in the following section I will discuss how a more deliberative framing model for political news, "fake" or "real," might acknowledge the reality that strategic communication pervades political practices, yet also emphasize the public's efficacy in order to mitigate the effects of cynical learning on political engagement.

Future Research

This research provides additional evidence supporting Capella and Jamieson's (1997) call for news framing that enhances, rather than subverts, political engagement among media audiences. Specifically, this research indicates a need for the development of a model of news framing intended to overcome the cynical effect of strategic learning, because cynicism may be a realistic result of exposure to political news in an ideologically extreme environment. In a 2003 declaration, the Public Journalism Network states that "the best journalism helps people see the world as a whole and helps them take responsibility for what they see."¹ Political news framing effects may be an important factor shaping how likely audiences are to take responsibility for what they learn from political news. Therefore, I propose adapting elements of Witte's (1998)

¹ Retrieved from www.pjnet.org/charter.shtml

Extended Parallel Processing Model from the field of persuasion to the construction of a model for deliberative news framing that would motivate politically engaged behavior.

In her research, Witte (1998) says that a fear appeal is a persuasive message that arouses fear by communicating a personally relevant and significant threat followed by a recommendation for deterring the threat. Witte explains that fear appeals motivate two potential responses: fear control or danger control. The former consists of denying or avoiding thinking about a threat, and the latter consists of taking protective action. Which response individuals have, according to Witte, depends upon their *perceived efficacy*, or a combination of their beliefs about the effectiveness of the recommended response to the threat and their beliefs about their ability to successfully perform the recommended response. Research has already shown that strategy-framed political messages may arouse cynicism (Capella and Jamieson 1997; Lee 2005). Perhaps, like fear, whether cynicism leads to political engagement or disengagement depends on if audiences perceive that the news is both relevant to them and that that they have power to affect the situation. Gastil (2000) says that “past research has shown clear links between various forms of political efficacy and political action” (359); therefore, if media can increase viewers’ sense of political efficacy, they may encourage greater political engagement. If a political news report focusing on strategic communication also contains a clear relevancy message and a clear efficacy message depicting a feasible engaged response, cynicism might lead to political action rather than disengagement.

In theory, news frames prime audiences for political learning through a process in which they activate particular knowledge pathways while bypassing others and consequently make some nodes of stored information more accessible than others (D’Angelo et al. 2005). By including relevancy and efficacy messages, political news might prime deliberative knowledge

networks made up of substantive political knowledge, rather than activating the strategy schemas that Capella and Jamieson (1997) claim lead to political disengagement. Future research could investigate this possibility by integrating relevancy and efficacy messages into political news in order to test whether those additions increase central processing and heighten perceived efficacy among audience members. This would require that future research develop a clear and comprehensive typology of the necessary dimensions of relevancy and efficacy messages and begin testing their effects on media audiences' intentions to participate in politics. In addition, researchers should examine a greater range of political engagement measures than intention to vote or intention to attend a public meeting. The measures of political engagement could also include intention to volunteer for a campaign for a candidate or an issue, intention to discuss political issues through interpersonal, small group, and/or public communication, intention to pursue additional information regarding a political issue or candidate from other sources, intention to run for political office, and/or intention to communicate with a political official.

Limitations of the Study

This research leaves unanswered multiple questions for future research. First, it cannot answer the question of whether *TDS*'s engagement of the strategy frame is a realistic reflection or a strategic interpretation of the political news environment, because this analysis has provided only superficial analysis of the political discourses that dominated politicians' speeches and the traditional news media coverage of the debt ceiling debate. An analysis of the debt ceiling coverage that aired on traditional news outlets or an analysis of the content of key actors' rhetoric throughout the negotiation could offer greater insight into the degrees to which *TDS*'s strategy-framed coverage demonstrates realism, cynicism, or both. Additionally, an analysis comparing the actual political debates with the traditional media coverage and the satiric

coverage of the debates is an area of research that would offer greater insight into whether strategy frames are a product of strategic communication taking place in political debates or if strategy frames are imposed unnecessarily by traditional and/or satiric news programs.

Finally, a major limitation of this research is its scope. By analyzing coverage of the debt ceiling, which was a display in divisive politics, this study was dealing with a sample of segments that is predisposed to contain strategically communicated information; therefore, this sample may not represent all *TDS* coverage. Therefore, the generalizability of the conclusions drawn in this thesis is quite limited. In fact, rhetorical scholars should practice caution before concluding that *TDS*'s framing practices are problematic because in the name of research we, like *TDS*, readily and regularly critique political communication. Furthermore, since only the satiric news reports and parody interviews performed by *TDS* cast members were studied while the interview segments which occur at the end of each episode were excluded from this sample, it is important to exercise caution in making any claims about what the program, overall, contributes to democracy. Research has suggested that Stewart engages in deliberative, commonality-seeking conversations in *TDS*'s interview segments (Baym, 2007), and Barber's (1984) concept of *strong democracy* revolves around these types of conversation. Barber defines conversation as "an informal dialectic in which talk is used . . . to explore and create commonalities" (183). An emphasis on developing commonality through conversation was largely overlooked in Habermas's early discussion of rational discourse in the public sphere, but Barber insists that it is essential to democracy because it legitimates multiple and potentially competing perspectives. Whereas rational discourse may at times have a polarizing effect on interlocutors, Barber argues that conversation incorporates "a dynamic of interaction that permits transient convergences as well as ongoing differences" (185). Therefore, future research should

analyze interview segments to determine if the content of interviews demonstrates deliberative communication, which could be useful for making more accurate assumptions about *TDS*'s potential impact on audience members' attitudes about and intentions to participate in politics.

Conclusion

This research has determined that there are ways in which *TDS*'s fake news and parody interview segments may both strengthen and undermine the conditions for democracy. Redaction strategies may benefit audiences by enabling closer scrutiny of politics; however, focusing on strategic communication at the expense of other aspects of politics may direct audiences' attention to information that leads to distrusting government. This research has also identified that the media system is inherently conflicted by competing market interests and democratic interests. *TDS* may be positioned to declare itself exempt from "real" news standards, but it cannot declare itself exempt from the market-driven model of mass media that requires it to entertain a large enough audience to secure sponsorship. The reality that media systems must secure audiences is one of the reasons researchers frequently cite for the conflict between market and democratic interests in the media system (e.g., Aalberg et al. 2012; Iyengar et al. 2004; Hauser 1994; Andersen and Thorson 1989; Habermas 1989) and points not only to the need for media reform, but for greater efforts to be made in the advancement of organizations that function to improve the conditions for political engagement through public discussion and deliberation (Gastil and Dillard 1999; Carcasson and Sprain 2010; Carcasson 2010).

My hope, as a frequent viewer of the show, is that future research will indicate that *TDS* increases political learning, diversifies political discourses, and encourages close scrutiny of and lively discussions about politics among audiences. However, it is clear that even at its best, *TDS* is constrained (deliberatively speaking) by both the strategic political climate and market-driven

media model in which it is situated. Therefore, I have made suggestions for a framing model including efficacy messages, because communication scholarship shows how important they are for motivating political engagement (Gastil 2000). Communication researchers should continue to offer potential improvements for media practices, because we are uniquely equipped to advance communication solutions for challenges to effective mediated deliberation. As Craig (1997) points out, communication theory “claims no more than to be useful” (154), and applying our communication knowledge to enhancing conditions for democracy is necessary and useful labor, indeed.

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