

The Political Socialization Effects Of *The Daily Show* And *The Colbert Report* In High
School Aged Adolescents

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Communication

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Communication

May 2007

To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the thesis of Evan Sarah Epstein find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Chair

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to extend my gratitude to everyone who helped me along the way. First and foremost, the administrators and teachers of Pullman High School, without their support, this would be another thesis entirely. I would also like to thank my committee and members and my chair for unrelenting support throughout the entire process; Cara Gish for help with the data collection; Yvonne Chen and Rebecca Van de Vord for help with data analysis; and Sean Monahan for unyielding emotional and technical support.

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Abstract

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May 2007

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This study examines to what effect political satire programs such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* effect the political socialization process of high school students. I used a purposive sample of 173 high school students in Eastern Washington state during the week prior to the 2006 midterm elections to assess high school students' levels of political efficacy, cynicism, skepticism, involvement, complacency, and apathy. Watching *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* associated positively with increased political efficacy, however, watching these programs had little to no effect on cynicism, skepticism, involvement, complacency, or apathy. The results suggest that high school students watch these programs as they find them informative and entertaining at the same time. I argue there is significance in the finding that cynicism and skepticism did not relate with watching these programs as some researchers and pundits suggest they create political disaffection.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Literature review.....	2
2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	26
Procedures.....	26
Measures.....	27
Stimulus Development.....	29
3. ANALYSIS.....	31
Results.....	31
Discussion.....	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	41
APPENDIX	
A. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS.....	46
B. SURVEY INSTRUMENT.....	47
C. STIMULUS DESCRIBED.....	61
D. DESCRIPTIVES TABLE FOR INDICES.....	62

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In 1992, Arsenio Hall's late night TV show played host to democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton, donning sunglasses and playing a saxophone. That same year Jay Leno put Clinton's chief strategist, James Carville on as his number one guest, billing him as the "man who helped get Bill Clinton elected" (Matalin & Carville, 1994). Senator John Edwards announced his candidacy for the democratic presidential nomination in 2003 on *The Daily Show*, to which the host, Jon Stewart, responded tongue-in-cheek that since *The Daily Show* is a fake news show – the announcement did not count (Peterson, 2004). This may be what Meroney (2000) points to as a growing trend that is here to stay. "Late night TV has become as critical to national candidates as their policy speeches, rallies, and debates" (7)...and for many young people, "such programs and their hosts are perceived as vital sources of political information and news" (Hollander, 2005, p. 402).

In 1971, 18-year-olds gained the right to vote, yet since then, the youth vote (generally considered 18-25 years of age) has been in a state of decline (Pinkleton & Austin, 2004; Carr, 2005). The number of voters younger than 30 in the 2004 presidential elections grew to at least 47 percent (census.gov). The slight rise in young voters reversed the decline that lasted more than three decades except for a spike in 1992 (Gugliotta & Becker, *The Washington Post*, November 4, 2004; p. A43).

Only 42 % of 18-24-year-old Americans voted in the 2000 Presidential election compared to 70 percent of people 25 and older (Carr, 2005, 47; Piven, 2004). Alternately, exit-poll data from the Associated Press found 18 - 24-year-old voters counted for 10 percent of all voters – the same proportion as in 2000. The total number of voters increased from 105 million to upward of 120 million and the youth vote is believed to have increased that number proportionally (Carr, 2005). Young voters in the 2004 Presidential elections saw Senator John

Kerry courting the pro-wrestling population through “SmackDown Your Vote!” and President George W. Bush grooving to OutKast, as roughly 30 million youth votes were “up for grabs” (Carr, 2005, p. 47).

Generally, a good campaign retains, builds and ultimately produces a winning combination of voters (Paletz, 2002). This involves ensuring the candidate is seen favorably by the electorate, which includes the positive aspects of the candidate’s personality and political record must be ramped up and the negative ones played down. The strategy behind this tactic is driven by three main subjects: the candidate’s party affiliation, issues, and image (Paletz, 2002). As such, one of the major avenues for reaching this youth vote has been increasingly through late-night talk shows and news satire programs.

Politics is becoming increasingly inseparable from entertainment media. In order for the political landscape to be easily digested by the average American, entertainment politics, or as Moy (2005) calls it, “infotainment” is becoming an increasing norm and at some level, politicians and their consultants have recognized the possibility that the political beliefs of Americans are influenced by the entertainment media (Jackson, 2002).

The important question raised by the popularity of these shows is whether they help or hinder civic participation. This thesis therefore seeks to examine the effects of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* on high school aged adolescents’ understanding of politics and current events.

Literature Review

Political Socialization.

A concern with the declining participation of youth voters brought political socialization research to the spotlight in the 1960s (Chaffee et al. 1970; Knutson, 1974; McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002). The first major study to examine the possible effects of mass media on the political socialization process, conducted during the 1968 presidential campaign, found that

exposure to public affairs via the media holds a moderate correlation with political knowledge (Chaffee et al. 1970). This field all but disappeared in the 1970s due to a flawed transmission model approach that positioned children to be the direct and unthinking recipients of their parent's political dogma. Or as Meadowcroft (1986) puts it: "until children develop the cognitive skills necessary to understand the messages conveyed within the family communication, they cannot be expected to participate effectively and their behavior does not necessarily confirm to their familial examples"(p. 605).

There is also literature to suggest that the stage of a child's cognitive development is a significant factor in a child or an adolescent's understanding of politics. Meadowcroft (1986) states that a cognitive revolution of sorts happens in children at about seven years of age and again when they are about 13-years-old, when they are able to really grasp political concepts such as identifying governing bodies, voting and the concept of participation. In fact, Meadowcroft (1986) found a variance in communication patterns which points to children as active agents in the socialization of the family as a whole. Building on this concept in recent years, researchers have indeed found a correlation between child political learning and parent political learning (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002). It seems that as the child learns, so too does the parent. This means that children can socialize their parents. "Adolescents are not merely receptive to civic development; they possess the power to transform patterns of family communication in ways that benefit themselves and their parents" (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002, p. 282).

A renewed interest in political socialization arose in the 1990s under the notion that children are not seen simply as sponges, ready and willing to soak up their parent's ideology, but active participants in their development into (varying degrees of) political beings. Under this light, political socialization is generally considered a two-stage process whereby the child first receives their parent's interpretations of politics and adopts beliefs similar to their parents and is

then persuaded through messages from friends, organizations and the media to adopt their views of politics (Austin and Nelson, 1993; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002).

As noted by Pinkleton and Austin, a young person's attitude toward public affairs is shaped by individual and environmental characteristics (2004, p. 321). In addition, political socialization includes parents, schools, peers and increasingly so – the media (Jackson, 2005; Pinkleton & Austin, 2004). Although each of these carries an impact on the political socialization process, the extent to which each of the elements influences children and adolescents varies with age. At a young age, children are more likely to share political and societal ideologies with their parents, however, as they grow older, their alignment with the parent's ideology wanes (Austin and Pinkleton, 2001; Knutson, 1974; Meadowcroft, 1986).

If parents have so little enduring impact on their children's political ideology, other mediating factors must come into play. As Knutson (1974) explains it, the ideologies of the parents are "pre-political" ideologies which children emulate, and thus, function as the base for all future beliefs. At a certain point in development however, children find other elements to build upon their existing base of information.

Definitions of Political Socialization. Before defining the socialization effects of the political process, it is important to understand the definition of politics. Jackson (2002) defines politics as the activities within a society relevant to the acquisition, use, and retention of power. With that in mind, a political ideology (typically a collection of ideas, containing certain thoughts on what they consider to be the best form of government) can be seen as a set of beliefs about politics.

Scholars define political socialization in varying terms, and thus, it is not necessarily an easy term to define. Austin and Nelson (1993, 420) define it as "a process by which individuals obtain relevant knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable them to function competently in the social-political culture." Similarly, Eveland, McLeod & Horowitz, (1998) define

socialization as “a process that is dependent on the interaction of several factors, including cognitive capacity and information levels” (702). In this vein, McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod (2002) define political communication as the “exchange of symbols and messages between political actors and institutions, the general public, and the news media that are the products of or have consequences for the political system” (p. 217).

Essentially, political socialization is an outcome of political communication efforts – or as McLeod and his colleagues’ wrote, a macro level effect. In the words of Johnson-Cartee (2005) “what one knows and what one thinks one knows are both shaped by the communication process” (p. 2) – which are centered on the media.

Some scholars posit that political socialization can be seen in stages, parts, or models. Paletz (2002) believes political socialization is best seen in six main parts: *System legitimacy*, the belief that the country’s political system and its institutions deserve faithfulness, indifference, or opposition. Second is *political efficacy*, the belief that one’s political behavior can be effective and have results, or not. Third is *political participation*, the belief that one should participate in politics or not. Fourth is *partisan identification*, identifying oneself with a political party. Fifth, *group identification*, is identifying oneself with various groups in the society. Finally, sixth is *policy preference*, the inclination to adopt or support some policy positions and oppose others (p.130).

Jennings and Niemi (1981) define political socialization in terms of four mutually exclusive models. The *lifelong persistence model* refers to what children learn early on in life and remains solid within them. The *lifelong openness model* posits that ideas learned in childhood hold little to no effect on them as they become adults. The *life-cycle model* holds that early learning is true, but that at certain points in life people are more open to change. Finally, the *generational model* points out that even though persistence may be a foundation for political socialization, there are certain political and social movements that may influence an individual’s

beliefs. Correspondingly, Niemi & Sobieszek (1977) state that colleges have more influence on a young person's political development than any other schooling and that this may be because it is easier to change college students' opinions.

Despite the varying definitions, Jackson (2002) points out that there are a number of similarities between these definitions. Socialization is always defined as a *process*. It does not occur overnight nor can one single influence affect all future political decisions. As stated above, parental influence is considered to be the first contributor to socialization. Parental influence is generally followed by school socialization where students learn about the basic tenants of government and politics, referred to by Jackson (2002) as textbook knowledge. Beyond home and school, adolescents gain an increasing amount of knowledge about the political spectrum via the media. Chaffee and Yang (1990) even go so far as to define the use of media by adolescents as their bridge to politics.

The second shared characteristic of the definitions of socialization according to Jackson (2002) is that the individual obtains *knowledge*. When it comes to civics and politics, parents generally do not spend much time on explaining the rudimentary elements of the American government. Jackson (2002) posits that school and the media fill in the holes the parents leave empty. The media are easy to access and seem to have an authority on newsworthy events and public affairs (Atkin, 1981).

Finally, and possibly most importantly for the purpose of this paper, Jackson (2002) states that socialization is a process that imparts political *beliefs, values or norms*. These beliefs, values and norms are related to the media in that mass communication gives children a base from which to draw their political knowledge. In fact, children cite media as more influential than their parents, teachers and peers when it comes to gathering political and current events knowledge (Chaffee, Ward & Tipton, 1970; Arnett, 1995; Hobbs, 1998). Organizations and programs serve to offer suggestions or ideas about the political system. With that in mind,

political talk shows such as *Hardball* and *Crossfire* and political satire such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* may influence and/or reinforce people's opinions and perceptions about the political scene.

The 2004 presidential election proved to be a good example of political persuasion to act. An example of this was that a number of celebrities mentioned Vote for Change, the PAC for MoveOn, a campaign from which contributions provided financial support to congressional and presidential candidates who supported moderate to progressive principles. Their most influential celebrity endorsement however, came from their Vote for Change tour, which included: Pearl Jam, Bruce Springsteen, R.E.M, Dave Matthews Band, Jurassic 5, Dixie Chicks, Death Cab For Cutie, James Taylor, Ben Harper, My Morning Jacket, Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, John Fogerty, Keb' Mo', Bright Eyes, John Mellencamp, Kenny "Baby Face" Edmonds, and Tracy Chapman – to name a few. These endorsements not only added a bit of pizzazz to the electoral process, they actually increased a sense of self-efficacy among the youth vote and increased voter turn out among the 18-25 year-old age group (Austin, Van de Vord, Pinkleton and Epstein, 2006).

Vehicles of Socialization. The literature suggests a young person's attitudes about politics results from a developmental process dependent on both individual and environmental characteristics (Pinkleton & Austin, 2004; Arnett, 1995). Humans are not born with political values and political knowledge, but acquire them through political socialization, and according to Chaffee & Yang (1990), youth define media not only as their main source of political information, but a significant influence on their political options. Media, it seems, is used by adolescents as the bridge between interpersonal and primary group socialization, and socialization to the larger political system – adolescents are attracted to media content as it is geared to attract large audiences (Chaffee & Yang, 1990).

Family. Most of the early political socialization studies examined children's awareness and reaction to political authority figures and focused on the "benevolent leader" and its effects on children (Chaffee, 1970; Chaffee et al., 1973; Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977). Initially, family was considered as the main socializing agent in a child's development. Typically the parents were seen as the essential link and teacher between their children and society, and studies show that young people are indeed reflections of their parents. Niemi & Sobieszek (1977) however wrote: "they are pale reflections, especially beyond the realm of partisanship and voting" (p. 218). Researchers such as Jennings and Niemi (1981) did not find a strong correlation between children and their parent's political ideology. In fact, they found that the correlation between a child and their parent's ideology wanes over time as children age (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001; Jennings & Niemi, 1981). One reason for the limited impact of parents may be a lack of parent-child talk about politics (Atkin, 1981; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002). The greater agents of socialization in adolescence, as compared to preadolescence, tend to be the school, the mass media and peers (Chaffee, McLeod & Wackman, 1973). However, Chaffee et al. (1973) also found that the amount of influence the parent has over the child is related to the type of family learning structure they maintain and that influences may be indirect.

Schools. Schools are another component of the socialization process. Schools can be seen as agents of socialization insofar that the school curriculum teaches basic political knowledge to young students. McDevitt and Chaffee (2002) point out that civics curricula have been inconsistent with children's political socialization beyond providing a basic knowledge about governmental institutions and processes. Similarly, Niemi & Sobieszek (1977) state that high school teaching gives students the skills to understand politics, but does not have an impact on students' political attitudes. Furthermore, in a study conducted by Andolina, Keeter, Zukin & Jenkins (2006), nearly half of all participants aged 15-25 claimed civics education at the very

least increases their interest in public affairs. They do not necessarily teach beliefs, attitudes or values about politics beyond basic civics and the necessity of participating in government.

There are some though who believe schools serve not so much as socializing agents, but as indoctrinators (Paletz, 2002). The recital of the pledge of allegiance is considered by some to be an instrument of indoctrination, in that children are not encouraged to think about or question what it is that they are doing. Conversely, Knowles (1993) found that schools served as socializing agents in children's understanding of the Iraq war in 1991. She found school to be an agent of socialization for information about the war and development of patriotic attitudes and a majority of the images and information educators used came from television, as it is the most immediate, easily accessible and understandable information on current events.

Media. Until the 1970s, most researchers did not consider media as a crucial player in the political socialization process, and very few studies even included media variables (Akin, 1981). Although many sources of political socialization stem from parents, schools and peers, the media provide much of what children and adolescents learn about their political environment (Arnett, 1995; Jackson, 2002; Pinkleton & Austin, 2004). In fact, in a study of political socialization and mass media, Chaffee, Ward & Tipton (1970) found that young people rate the media as more influential than parents, teachers or peers. Similarly, Chaffee & Yang (1990) find that the media serve as the first real contact with politics for many children. This may be attributed in part because parents do not generally talk to their children on a regular basis about politics. A study from civicyouth.org, found that during adolescence only 16 percent of respondents said their parents talked to them on a regular basis about politics, with a majority of those surveyed stating that their parents "sometimes" or "not so often" brought up the topic (civicyouth.org).

Adolescents also use media as a way of diverting themselves from personal concerns with a more passive, undemanding form of entertainment (Arnett, 1995). Watching television news and reading the newspaper are related to an adolescent's political knowledge and

participation, however, adolescents also tend to be higher sensation seekers than adults and certain media can provide that environment (Arnett, 1995). It is in this vein that entertainment programs such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* may have a one-up on the nightly evening news - they present news with flair.

The Daily Show

The Daily Show (whose slogan reads: “It’s better than being informed!”) is a half-hour satirical news program produced by and run on the Comedy Central cable news network (www.comedycentral.com). The show was originally hosted by anchor Craig Kilborn, who left the show in 1999 and was replaced by Jon Stewart. In 2004, Comedy Central estimated a nightly audience for the show of 1.2 million people, with another 800,000 watching re-runs – not surprisingly, 40 percent of those tuning in are 19 to 29 years of age (Baym, 2005). The news-related comedy is often likened to Michael Moore’s “TV Nation” and Saturday Night Live’s “Weekend Update.”

The Daily Show satirically reports on the idiosyncrasies and hypocrisy of the real world. As Baym (2005) puts it, “*The Daily Show* uses humor as the license to confront political dissembling and misinformation and to demand a measure of accountability. In so doing, the program is attempting to revive a spirit of critical inquiry...that largely has been abdicated by the post-September 11 news media” (p. 268).

The news segment predominantly focuses on national and international issues such as American foreign and domestic policy, the war on terrorism, and election coverage of both primary parties. Where *The Daily Show* significantly differs from mainstream broadcast news is the show’s ability to focus in on an issue – at times spending upward of ten minutes on a single issue. This format, says Baym (2005) allows for a wider view of topics and contexts – providing background and historical information about the topics of discussion. When compared to mainstream broadcast news, which usually plays eight to 12 seconds of footage, and gives little

to no contextual information, *The Daily Show* provides far more insight. This format differs from other late-night programming in that a substantially larger portion of the program is devoted to news and politics, with almost the entire program devoted to current events during election seasons and times of national crises.

For example, Baym (2005) found that by playing more footage and spending more time on a topic, the viewer actually gets a better idea of what is going on. By looking at an eight second clip network news aired of Bush's statement following CIA Director George Tenet's resignation and *The Daily Show's* full reel of Bush's speech, it is evident that although both versions are accurate, they portray markedly different scenarios.

There is however, some research which points toward *The Daily Show* as a negative influence on voting behavior (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006). Their study found young Americans who watch the show tend to have a lower support for presidential candidates and an increased cynicism towards the electoral process as a whole.

The Baumgartner and Morris (2006) study nevertheless ignores the fact that turnout among youth voters went up in the 2004 election despite what Baumgartner and Morris (2006) find as a cynical effect. Their study also suggests that although *The Daily Show* creates cynicism toward the media and the electoral process, it also gives young viewers confidence about their own abilities to understand politics. In addition, the students chosen to participate in the study were not chosen on the basis of whether or not they watch *The Daily Show*, which would have a large impact on the outcome of the study.

Despite some research on the negative effects of the program, *The Daily Show* still retains a rather high notoriety in the news industry. It won a Peabody Award and was nominated as one of the best newscasts by the TV Critics Association (Baym, 2005). At the start of the 2004 presidential campaign, *Newsday* named Stewart as the single most important newscaster in the country. Though it may be Bill Moyers, dean of American public service television news

that put it best: “You simply can’t understand American politics in the new millennium without *The Daily Show*” (Baym, 2005).

The Daily Show also includes interviews with celebrity and political figures. The show hosts political players such as the Republican National Committee Chairman, Ed Gillespie, Senators Bob Dole, John Kerry, and John McCain, former Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton – to name a few (www.comedycentral.com).

The Colbert Report

The Colbert Report is a spin-off program from *The Daily Show* starring Stephen Colbert, best-known as a correspondent for The Daily Show. Colbert is depicted in this parody program as a media pundit mirroring such programs as “The O’Reilly Factor” and “Hannity and Colmes” (www.comedycentral.com).

The Colbert Report drew an unusual amount of media anticipation prior to its premiere, including from *The New Yorker*, NPR's *All Things Considered* and *Fresh Air*, CNN, and *The Washington Post*. *The New York Times* alone ran three articles on the Report before its debut, and has made repeated references to The Colbert Report since then. It drew 1.13 million viewers for its premiere episode – 47 percent higher than the average for that time slot over the previous four weeks and a full 98 percent of the viewership of *The Daily Show*, which itself has Comedy Central's second-largest viewership, behind *South Park*. In the past year, Stephen Colbert has started to garner the attention of national media and receive many of the honors those considering themselves to be “real journalists” strive for. Colbert was invited to the 2006 White House Correspondents Dinner, and promptly made headlines by skewering President Bush and his policies during his speech in front of invited guests and the White House Press Corps. In January of 2006, the American Dialect Society voted Stephen Colbert’s word, “truthiness” as the word of the year which is defined as preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts known to be true. As Colbert put it, “I don’t trust books, they’re all fact, no heart”

(www.americandialect.org). In August of 2006, *Wired* magazine featured Stephen Colbert boasting that you can become an expert at anything...so long as the truth or reality of the scenario can be manipulated (Hockenberry, 2006). Most recently, the ice cream company Ben & Jerry's named an ice cream flavor after the satirical pundit: "Stephen Colbert's Americone Dream." Billed as "the sweet taste of liberty in your mouth," it consists of vanilla ice cream with fudge-covered waffle cone pieces and a caramel swirl.

The use of political humor

Democratic strategist Mandy Grunwald was once quoted as saying, "If Leno or...Dennis Miller are making jokes about you, you have a serious problem. Whatever take they have on you is likely to stick much more solidly than what is in the political ads in papers like the Washington Post" (Grenier, 1999, p. 103, in Young, 2004).

Studies as far back as the 1930's studied the effects that political satire, such as cartoons, have on the voting public. However, in the 1990's researchers saw an increase in interest in the idea of satire news media's influence on the voting public.

Some of the literature suggests audiences learn about candidates' positions through exposure to satire programming, while others suggest that viewing such programs enhances pre-existing knowledge and reaffirms beliefs the person already held.

Much the media messages to which people are exposed as children are political in nature. Eveland, McLeod and Horowitz (1998) state that "as children age, they become more likely to use mass media news and to engage in political discussions" (706). The research suggests, however, that although people may take political information from the media, the influence of media does not extend to overt behavior such as campaigning activities. It is in this vein of research that Chaffee, Ward & Tipton (1970) pointed to entertainment media as an attractive alternative to a younger audience, where political learning is not necessarily an intention of viewing. Typically, other socializers, such as the family and schools, have an interest in an

adolescent accepting attitudes, beliefs and values to maintain the culture from one generation to the next. The media however, are likely to provide to adolescents whatever it is adolescents want (Arnett, 1995). As a result, the media tend to bear the most similarity to an adolescent's peers.

Both Atkin (1981) and Paletz (2002) illustrate this point using *Weekly Reader*, a children's magazine with over nine million subscribers, to which over two-thirds of all adults who attended public school subscribed to at some point. They state that this magazine established a political socialization from its very first issue and remains as a tool of political socialization today.

Likewise, Iyengar and Kinder state that television news shapes the American public's political priorities, setting the agenda of what Americans believe to be important issues (1987). This is accomplished through more media attention to some problems and issues and paying minimal attention to others. This tactic however, is not applicable to the political partisans. Those interested and active in politics are less likely to accept the mass media news agenda (Paletz, 2002).

Another vehicle of socialization, garnering more and more national attention, is Kids Voting USA, a program designed to educate school children about the nation's politics and to foster political socialization. The program, which began in Phoenix in 1988, became statewide in 1990 and grew to nationwide in 1992 with programs in 30 states. Meirick and Wackman (2004) found that this program did indeed make a difference in children's political knowledge. They also found that exposure to this program was related to campaign interest and attention to campaign news.

According to the lifelong openness model proposed by Jennings and Niemi (1981), children have very few ideological or political views before a certain age. Early studies posited that the reverse was true and that the media children were exposed to during adolescence helped

to reinforce preexisting beliefs instated by the parents. The current understanding of a child's media use is that news media use among children under 18 years of age is directly related to political knowledge and interpretation. Adolescents also have a freedom in choosing the media they are exposed to not only because of the rise of the media but because of the simultaneous decline of the family as a socializer during adolescence (Arnett, 1995) and the rise of personal media and the Internet.

Effects of Political Socialization

To understand the full impact the media has, general definitions of agenda setting, priming, knowledge gain, and framing are necessary. These four theories are the foundation for many political socialization studies.

Agenda Setting. Agenda setting refers to the media's ability to set public opinion by giving more weight to certain issues over others; telling people not what to think, but what to think of. According to Kiouisis, McDevitt and Wu (2005), agenda setting "has usually been viewed as a process that shapes cognitions. When agenda setting results in opinion strength for issues, a likely outcome is the strengthening of political ideology, an important criterion variable in political socialization" (p. 760, p. 769). In choosing and displaying news, journalists and editors play an important role in shaping the publics' political reality. Readers not only learn about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue...by determining the important issues, the media may set the 'agenda' of the campaign" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176).

Priming. Priming, the process by which certain portions of the news are highlighted through repeated exposure, is then a microprocess of agenda setting. For example, repeated coverage of a certain issue such as voting not only sets the public agenda, but gives understanding of how to interpret voting. Priming however, can occur independently from agenda setting. Roskos-Ewoldsen et. al (2002, 97) state that priming "refers to the effect of

some preceding stimulus or event on how we react, broadly defined, to some subsequent stimulus.” When applied to the media, priming refers to the way(s) in which media exposure may affect their later behavior. As such, Roskos-Ewoldsen et. al (2002) posits that the media is a powerful tool for priming how people think and behave. Media coverage of an issue influences which exemplars are retrieved from memory when people make judgments about the present (Iyengar & Simon, 1993, in Roskos-Ewoldsen). Some studies have shown voters exposed to more media coverage of campaigns tend to make up their minds based on how the media frames the horse race type contest of who is ahead in the polls and why (Jackson, 2002).

H1: High school students who watch *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* on a regular basis will show a higher level of political information efficacy, which will in turn boost their internal political efficacy.

H2: High school students who do not watch *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* on a regular basis, that are shown video clips of these programs will show a higher level of skepticism towards politics than those who do not.

Knowledge Gain. Evidence of knowledge gain about the current political climate through the media is a well-studied topic with varied support. Generally speaking, there is a relatively weak link between television news viewing and great political knowledge. One reason for this may be the “horse race” coverage the media gives to political campaigns. The focus tends to be on who is winning the race, rather than the issues and where the candidates stand on them (McLeod et. al, 2002). By choosing the news stories by their entertainment value rather than deep political importance, the media prevent more complex issues and deeper meanings from coming through in the evening broadcast. Increasingly, broadcast news gives viewers eight to ten second sound-bites, devoid of context or much content. McLeod et. al (2002) posit that this type of information manufacturing may cause the American viewing public to process information episodically rather than reflectively.

In contrast, in a study which provides the foundation for social cognitive theory, Bandura (1965) found that people can learn through observation and not just personal/ first-hand experience. His research also distinguished between acquisition and behavior in that one does not necessarily need to replicate behavior to have learned it. Bandura (1965) proved in one manipulation that the rewarding or punishment of the model had a bearing on whether children replicated the observed behaviors. When a reward is given, social sanctions against that action are removed. A second manipulation demonstrated the quality of acquisition among experiment groups showing that behavior does not necessarily have to be replicated to be learned. This in this light, adolescents may indeed learn how to think about political and current events via the television.

Similarly, Cohen (2001) believes that through identification, television viewers can vicariously experience things they cannot, or have not yet had the chance to experience in person. Broadly defined, identification leads people to the temporary adoption of an external point of view and to seeing the world through an alternate reality. Identification plays an important role in shaping aspects of society. It is also crucial to the socialization of children and the development of personal and social identities (Cohen, 2001). Children practice the ability to take on the perspectives of others, which eventually allows them to identify with a group.

When comparing identification to other forms of modeling however, Cohen (2001) defines Para Social Interaction (PSI) as a concept modeled similarly to friendship which is increased when audience members see a similarity between themselves and a character portrayed in the media (homophily). This also implies the viewer feels a connection or relationship to the character portrayed through various media outlets (television, radio, etc.) (Kelman, 1958). When a person compares or judges a character, they are required to activate their schemas and, hence be self aware. Comparatively, identification uses one's own psyche to imagine being someone else (Cohen, 2001, p.260). PSI (and homophily) then involves the viewer acting as an external

observer whereas identification positions the viewer inside the scenario. Identification is then more temporary and limited by the viewing experience (Cohen, 2001).

Framing. Framing in the sense of political socialization is the media's process of selective control over media content or public communication. Framing defines how a certain piece of media content is packaged so as to allow certain desirable interpretations to come to light and to rule out others. Media frames can be created by the media or by specific political or social movements or organizations. Framing then can be used as a cognitive shortcut of sorts: low levels of attention are needed to process to make just enough sense of an issue (McLeod et. al, 2002). In the words of Nelson, Clawson and Oxley, (1997, 567) "Framing is the process by which a communication source, such as a news organization [or a political leader, public relations officer, political advertising consultant, or news consumer], defines and constructs a political issue or a public controversy" (in, Johnson-Cartee, 2005).

H3: High school students who watch *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* versus those who are exposed to alternative programming will express an increased apathy and a decreased complacency towards the political process.

H4: High school students who frequently watch *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* tune in not only for the entertainment value but because the show puts political events into context and gives them more relevance for a political novice.

One necessary condition for any of the theories and hypotheses about political socialization through the media to hold true is that (young) people watch television. In a study of college student's use of media, Jackson (2002) found that almost 24 percent watched entertainment television for more than three hours per day and approximately 50 percent of the students surveyed watched more than two hours of television per day. Only 23.5 percent of students watched less than an hour of television a day. Jackson's findings point towards a section of the population very easy to reach via media and possibly very susceptible to its effects.

Those who spend more time watching television should be more accepting of the issues presented on television. Jackson (2002) posits that greater television viewing “indicates slightly more agreement with the belief that newer lifestyles contribute to the breakdown of society” (p. 63). This he says suggests a more conservative lifestyle view.

In that vein, the U.S. Census Bureau found that in 2001, 98.2% of the households in the United States had at least one TV – with an average of 2.4 television sets per home. The projected number of hours that adults (individually) would spend watching television in 2004 was 1,669 – the equivalent of 70 days (census.gov). It is logical to assume that a good amount of this viewing is related to news or news entertainment and that children and adolescents are exposed to it either by choice or by circumstance.

In a related study, Roberts, Foehr and Rideout (2005) found that the typical 8- to 18-year-old lives in a home containing three TV sets, three CD/tape players, three radios, three VCR/DVD players, two video game consoles, and a computer. In addition, Roberts et al. (2005) found substantial numbers of kids who have most of these media in their own bedrooms, with more than two-thirds (68%) having their own TV and more than half having their own VCR/DVD player (54 %). Almost one-third reported having their own personal computer (31%). Fewer than half (46%) of 8- to 18-year-olds reported that their family has any rules governing TV use, and among adolescents (7th- to 12th-graders) the proportions with rules governing TV, computers, video games, or music were even lower (Roberts, Foehr & Rideout, 2005). The result is that one out of every four 8- to 18-year-olds comes from what Roberts et al. (2005) is call a high TV orientation home — homes in which no rules govern TV viewing and the TV is on most of the time and usually plays during meals.

As a result, young people live media-saturated lives (Roberts, Foehr & Rideout, 2005) where they spend nearly 6½ hours per day using media. However, Andolina et al. (2006) found that despite adolescents’ high consumption of media, only about one-third of those surveyed in

the 15-25 year-old age group regularly followed the news through newspapers, radio and television. Adolescence is a time when important aspects of socialization are taking place and the use of various medias makes a definite impact on an adolescent's set of beliefs and values (Arnett, 1995).

In addition to the media effects of ritualistic viewing, Pinkleton and Austin (2001) argue that self-efficacy is an important precursor to political behavior as it spurs political involvement: "efficacy promotes political participation and individuals may develop efficacy as a result of experience with the social system" (p. 325). This relationship, however, as seen by Pinkleton and Austin (2001), is bidirectional, in that involvement is necessary to build efficacy and efficacy in turn is the foundation upon which a voter builds future involvement.

According to Pinkleton and Austin (1998) the socialization process is an interactive process by which individuals strive to develop the ability to function as competent members of society. As a result, "people are likely to participate in the political process to the extent that their participation will make a difference" (Pinkleton & Austin, 1998, 35).

In 2000 and again in 2002 the Pew Research Center shed a bit of light on the topic (Young, 2004). They gauged the predictors of late night programming exposure by asking respondents how often they watched such television shows. The results point toward 47 percent of 18 to 29 year olds as the most likely to regularly watch late night programming. When compared to the next closest – 34 percent of 30-44 year olds, this percentage is not only staggering, but indicates a possible link between current political knowledge and viewing of such programs. Indeed according to this study, Americans in the 18-29 age bracket were more likely than any other age group to receive more campaign information from late night programming than any other age group. The Pew studies support this finding, with its finding that late night is watched more by those politically inexperienced who find late night a valuable source of political information. Similarly, Gollin and Anderson (1980) found in a national sample of 6-to

17-year-olds that front page news ranks second only to comics – further proving the youth interest in humor over “real news.”

What is missing from previous studies is the link between why 18-29 year-olds and the politically inexperienced turn to political satire for information versus more traditional information routes, such as the evening broadcast news and newspapers. It is neither a good or bad thing that America’s youth turn to news satire for information. The problem lies in that youth are not seeking additional information from more “hard-line” news sources.

H5: High school students who watch *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* versus those who are exposed to alternative programming will have a desire to know more about the current political climate.

Young (2004) argues that the joking commentary on late night programming is unlike traditional forms of political information because in order to understand the joke, the audience must actively participate. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) posits that information processing can be seen in two ways: taking a peripheral route - a cognitive shortcut to process the information or a cognitively challenging central route (Petty, Priester & Brinol, 2002). According to ELM, central processing is preferential as it increases the likelihood and ease of information recall at a later date (Petty, Priester & Brinol, 2002). It follows then, that in order to get the joke, an audience member/viewer must be attuned to the situation and centrally process *or* that they are primed to respond in a certain manner. Should an audience member/viewer repeatedly be told that something is funny or that it is socially acceptable to respond in a certain manner to a program, most will follow accordingly and laugh at the joke.

Heuristic processing, as mentioned above, refers to a limited mode of processing requiring little effort and few cognitive resources. Rather than make an effortful, exhaustive search of memory for information pertaining to a particular judgment (systematic processing), people who use a heuristic processing strategy tend to focus on information that allows them to

make simple decision. An individual may also use peripheral cues such as source expertise as the application of general knowledge when heuristically processing (Bless, 2001).

In addition, a person's mental state affects if they think systematically or heuristically. Individuals in positive moods tend to exert less effort in processing and tend to process more flexibly than those in a negative mood (Clore and Martin, 2001; Bless, 2001). This positive mood evaluation however is reliant on general knowledge structures such as stereotypes and schemas to process heuristically (Bless, 2001). Less effort needs to be applied to maintaining people's moods than to changing them. Heuristic processing will likely aid in maintaining moods, whereas systematic processing may eradicate them (Erber & Erber, 2001).

Schwarz (2001) suggests that in many situations, individuals avoid systematic processing and instead ask themselves how they feel about the target of judgment. If they feel good – they give a positive evaluation, if they feel poorly, they give a negative evaluation. The caveat however, is that if individuals become aware that their affective reactions are not due to the target, their reactions do not influence their judgments of the target. When information on the target subject is accessible, it will be used as the basis for judgment and will beat out generic feelings (Clore, et al., 2001).

Shrum (2001) addressed the cognitive processes involved in heuristic and systematic processing by encouraging participants to think systematically and interfering with their heuristic processing. He gave survey to participants in one group, asking them to be as accurate as possible, telling them that their answers would be graded by the experimenter who would then expect them to orally justify their answers. In the control condition, participants received a questionnaire that simply directed them to give “spontaneous” answers to the questions.

Through his experiment, he eliminated or minimized the impact of television on people's thought processes – he proved that heuristics are the mediating factor between television and

perceptions of social reality. Shrum (2001) made the connection between the heuristics people access through television viewing and what people believe to be a “spontaneous” response.

Similarly, Busselle (2003) examined the influences television has in increasing people’s awareness of crime and the frequency with which they talk about it with others. Busselle argued that the frequent activation of crime-related constructs through television viewing is related to the accessibility of them, which is in turn related to the frequency of parent’s precautionary warnings to their children.

His research suggests that this effect may also have second-level influences: treating crime-related messages, coming from parents or television as undifferentiated reminders of the presence of crime and violence in society (Busselle, 2003, p. 548). People may use television to understand their social reality, Busselle built upon that notion and suggested that while children and adolescents judge their parents to be credible information sources, the influence of television is not to be discounted as the information parents may be using to caution their children may originate in television.

Unfortunately, some viewers of late- night programming are less likely to be politically knowledgeable and may be receiving political information without previous knowledge to counter the arguments presented (Hollander, 1995). In a study of talk radio, Hollander (1995) found that listeners with less education exposed to such programs felt informed after listening to the program, however their actual campaign knowledge remained lacking (in Hollander, 2005). Similarly, Eveland et al. (1998) found that for children to learn the political information presented to them, they must “have the cognitive capacity to process and understand the information” (709). Hence, late night viewers may be more affected by exposure to such programming and the ideas presented in such programming than others.

Additionally, Buckingham (1997) speculates that television news viewers understand and learn very little from what they watch on the “real” news. “The reasons for this are typically

seen to involve a combination of textual factors (such as brevity of news items, or the frequent lack of connection between visual and verbal material) and audience factors (such as viewer's lack of attention or knowledge of background information)" (p. 5). Buckingham (1997) posits that watching the news makes people feel as if they are informed, but it is a false sense of knowledge. With this in mind, it seems as if researchers place viewers in a paradox: they cannot understand the real news, but "fake" news is too sophisticated for them.

This paradox may be explained by what Delli Carpini (2000) points to as a lack of political efficacy among America's youth. According to a study by the National Association of Secretaries of State (Delli Carpini, 2000) 45% of 18-29 year-old Americans feel their vote does not matter, regardless of who wins an election, and a majority of those surveyed believed the Social Security system will not exist by the time they are old enough to use it.

There is a blurring line however, between what news is and what satire news is. Even CNN, considered by most to be a hard news source, broadcasts a special edition of *The Daily Show* on its international network. However, some researchers point toward soft or pseudo-news programs as important mechanisms which provide information about politics to citizens usually inattentive to such matters (Baum, 2002, in Moy, Xenos & Hess, 2005).

In their study of political "infotainment" consumption's impact on civic engagement, Moy et al. (2005) found that late-night comedy shows tended to draw an audience of young, unmarried males, and that those who tended to watch these programs were largely viewers with higher levels of political interest who held similar attitudes or issues to those of the programs. Following this, Moy et. al (2005) discovered that attention to the news via nontraditional sources tended to increase interest in political campaigns.

Others find the audience of such programs to be less educated and interested in politics as the mainstream media audience (Hollander, 2005). Hollander (2005) also found that younger people tended to seek out news-comedy or other entertainment- based programs to keep up with

a political campaign and that watching such programs is more likely to be associated with recognition of campaign information.

In sum, adolescents and young adults tend to use media above all else to learn about the current political climate and other current affairs issues. While there are a variety of socializing factors that come into play with each individual, many youths are quick to use news satire or late-night comedy to gain insight into public affairs. Therefore the following research questions are asked:

RQ1: How does programming such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* affect high school students' political self-efficacy?

RQ2: What aspects of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* make it appealing to high school students?

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Method

Procedures

In the fall of 2006, 173 high school students in a small northwestern town participated in an experiment assessing how and if programs such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* have any effect on their political efficacy, cynicism, skepticism, involvement, complacency, and apathy. Participants were selected by year in school (junior or senior standing) as they are nearing the age where they may participate in politics. In addition, participants were enrolled in classes such as Current World Problems, U.S. History, World History, and English, as these students are generally exposed to discussion about politics and current affairs on a regular basis. The experiment consisted of a pre-test, post-test survey design in which students were broken into two groups: those receiving the stimulus – watching *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* and those in the control group who watched *Sponge Bob Square Pants*. The experiment was conducted during class time with help from the students' teachers, as the information from the study is relevant to class materials. With consent from the school district, the high school principal and the individual teachers who offered their classes for the experiment, students only then participated if they turned in a parental consent form and signed a minor assent form. Teachers whose classes were selected for the experiment offered their classes in co-operation with the researcher as they hold an interest in the results this experiment generates. Participants averaged 16.5 years of age and represented an even split of boys 48.6% (n = 84) and girls 50.9% (n = 88), with one respondent declining to provide demographic information.

The research method employed a 2 x 2 factorial design. Students who frequently watch *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (n = 49) and *The Colbert Report* (n = 36) made up one group,

while those who never to sometimes watch these shows made up the second (for DS, $n = 123$), (for CR, $n = 136$). Those surveyed would also be broken into two groups, with one being exposed to clips of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* ($n = 94$) before taking the survey, and the other taking the survey after watching *Sponge Bob Square Pants* ($n = 79$) as a control.

The experiment used a purposive sampling method as it more likely highlight the differences between those who watch these programs frequently or sometimes to never. Since the basis of the study was to find out how watching *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* programs influence an adolescent's perception of politics and current events, this method would clearly define the differences between the sub-groups (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). By selecting participants who could be defined as those who watch and do not watch these programs, the researcher could tease out a typical or representative viewer (Austin & Pinkleton, 2006) and thus obtain a more clear view of how watching *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* affects high school students.

Measures

Efficacy, cynicism, skepticism, involvement, complacency, and apathy: Participants completed 35 items measuring their estimates of the need and importance of their vote and their feelings about the political system and how they fit into it. The measures were modeled after those used by Pinkleton et al. (1998, 2005) and Kaid (2006). The response option for each answer was a seven-point likert scale with an additional point to provide respondents with a "don't know" option.

Efficacy, sometimes called internal efficacy, is the reflection of people's beliefs about their own competence to understand and participate effectively in politics (Pinkleton, et al., 2002). The efficacy measure for this experiment consisted of five items ($\alpha = .78$) including, "I can make a difference if I participate in elections," "Voting gives people an effective way to

influence what government does,” “When I am able to vote, my vote will make a difference,” and “Elections are the way that average people get a say in government.”

Personal efficacy is a person’s belief that through their own efforts, they can effect or influence political and social events (Pinkleton, et al., 2002). The personal efficacy measure for this experiment consisted of five items ($\alpha = .81$) including, “I feel I am a well-qualified person to participate in politics,” “If a friend asked me about the election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for,” “I think I am better informed about politics than most people my age,” “I feel I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country,” and “I expect the candidates will think my vote is important when I am 18-25-years old.”

Cynicism refers to a lack of confidence and a lack of trust in the political system and in some cases people up on the political process all together (Crotty & Jacobson, 1980). The cynicism measure for this study consisted of four items ($\alpha = .67$) including, “Public officials seem to put their own interest ahead of the public interest,” “I have a critical attitude toward politics,” “It seems like politicians only care about special interests,” and “Most politicians are honest.”

The skepticism measure was broken into two parts: skepticism toward politics/politicians and skepticism toward media. A skeptic in the context of this study is generally considered someone who questions the reliability of certain kinds of claims made by politicians or the media and subjects these claims to some sort of investigation. Skepticism toward politics/politicians consisted of six items ($\alpha = .71$) including, “I always think twice about things politicians say,” “It seems most politicians have my best interest at heart,” “I think about statements made by governmental leaders before I accept or reject them as true,” “Elections are about politicians getting elected,” and “Politicians are out of touch with life in the real world.” Skepticism toward the media consisted of three items ($\alpha = .86$) including, “I have a critical attitude toward news

media,” “You can really trust news stories about politics” and “Most news stories about the election have been accurate.”

Involvement is generally an important predictor of a person’s participation in the political system as it motivates the individual to learn more about the political process. The involvement measure for this study consisted of four items ($\alpha = .65$) including “I seek out additional information to confirm or disconfirm things I learn from a news story,” “When I hear about something on TV, I actively seek out more information on that topic,” “I plan to vote in the next presidential election,” and “I’m interested in election information.”

Complacency in the political process refers to a citizen’s feeling of comfort with the status quo and thus this person feels less of a pull to engage in politics and public affairs. The complacency measure for this study consisted of four items ($\alpha = .51$) including, “The country will be fine whether or not I vote,” “The country will be fine no matter who gets elected,” “Keeping up on political issues takes up too much time,” and “Politics are not relevant to my life right now.”

Apathy is generally considered to be a complete disengagement from the political process, including voting. The apathy measure for this study consisted of three items ($\alpha = .57$) including, “Staying informed about government takes too much trouble,” “Voting takes too much time” and “Participating in elections is more trouble than it is worth.”

Finally, participants were asked for demographic information pertaining to age, ethnic background, their parents’ annual household income, and their sex. Descriptive statistics for some measures used in the analysis can be found in Table 1. The reliability of indices was confirmed via the computation of Cronbach’s alpha. Factor analysis was also used to confirm that each index was distinct. For a complete list of descriptive statistics for each index mentioned above, please see Appendix D.

Table 1. *Demographic characteristics*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Parent's income (N=159)	65,500	30,000	1,642
Year in school (N=172)	3.16	.538	.289
Age (N=172)	16.51	.65	.43

Stimulus development

The experimental group's stimulus was generated over the span of three months leading up to the November 2006 election. The end product resulted in three 17-minute vignettes of clips from *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. The time frame of three months prior to the election was chosen because in the months leading up to an election the media become more and more saturated with material on various candidates and propositions. While *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are not considered to be hard news, they do serve as a news source for many and thus, so too do these programs become increasingly politically charged. The researcher recorded all episodes of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* aired during this time span and carefully watched each episode for themes such as commentary on political hopefuls, interviews with prominent politicians, commentary on the state of politics in America and abroad, and comical routines about American politics and society in general. After watching all the episodes, the researcher went back through and pulled out the routines that related to topics that would most likely not remain in the public eye for more than a few days or that contained subject material or language not suitable for a high school classroom. From the routines left, the researcher then compiled the vignettes, making sure to have common themes and topics represented in each one. Each vignette contained an interview with a prominent politician (one

democrat, one republican and one international). The researcher also made certain that common themes and ideas were represented in each vignette. The vignettes were recorded onto one DVD with a main menu to choose vignettes one at a time for viewing. Each vignette consisted of six scenes, with three from *The Daily Show* and three from *The Colbert Report* organized in an every-other order (DS,CR,DS,CR,etc.) as the shows are aired back-to-back with *The Colbert Report* retaining 98% of the viewer- ship from *The Daily Show*. Each experimental group viewed one vignette before continuing on to the post-test survey.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS

Results

Hypothesis 1 predicted that high school students who watch *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* on a regular basis would show a higher level of personal information efficacy, which would in turn boost their internal political efficacy. First, an independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether students who regularly watched *The Daily Show* indeed had a higher level of personal information efficacy. The test was significant, $t(170) = -2.7, p < .01$. Second, an independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether students who regularly watched *The Colbert Report* also had a higher level of personal information efficacy. This test was also significant, $t(170) = -3.7, p < .001$. Please see table one in appendix A for more descriptive statistics.

Table 2.

T-Test Testing Hypotheses

Dependent variable/ independent variable	Mean (S.D)	<i>t</i>
<i>Personal Information Efficacy</i>		
Daily Show	4.59 (1.35)	-2.7***
Colbert Report	4.86 (1.24)	-3.7***

*** $p < .001$

Finally, a multiple stepwise regression analysis was conducted to evaluate how well higher levels of personal information efficacy would predict higher levels of political efficacy. The linear combination of personal information efficacy measures was significantly positively related to the political efficacy index, $F(1,156) = 35.86, p < .001$. The standard beta coefficient was .43, indicating that approximately 19% of the variance of the political efficacy index in the sample can be accounted for by the linear combination of the personal efficacy measures. These results confirmed hypothesis 1.

Table 3.

Regressions Testing Hypotheses

Dependent variable/ independent variable	β	R^2	df	F
<i>Political Efficacy***</i>				
Personal Efficacy	.43	.19	(1,156)	35.86

Note. Standardized betas and significant levels for r^2 are reported only for the whole model. Demographic controls are noted only where significant.

*** $p < .001$

Hypothesis 2 predicted that high school students who do not watch *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* on a regular basis, who are shown clips of these programs will show a higher level of skepticism toward politicians than those who do not. An independent samples t test was conducted to test the hypothesis for responses on *The Daily Show*. The test was not significant $t(120) = .25, p = .80$ for skepticism toward the media and was not significant for skepticism toward politicians, $t(120) = 1.36, p = .17$. Additionally, an independent samples t test was conducted to test the hypothesis for responses on *The Colbert Report*. The responses for skepticism toward the media $t(120) = .25, p = .80$, and toward politicians $t(120) = 1.36, p = .17$ were identical to those of *The Daily Show*. Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Table 4.

T-Test Testing Hypotheses

Dependent variable/ independent variable	Mean (S.D)	t
<i>Skepticism toward media</i>		
Daily Show	3.77 (.84)	.80
Colbert Report	3.77 (.84)	.80
<i>Skepticism toward politics</i>		
Daily Show	4.88 (.97)	.17
Colbert Report	4.88 (.97)	.17

Results are not significant

Hypothesis 3 predicted that high school students who watch *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* versus those who are exposed to alternative programming (during the

experiment) would express an increased apathy and decreased complacency toward politics. First, an independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate respondent's sentiments of complacency as related to watching *The Daily Show*. The test was not significant, $t(170) = .55$, $p = .58$. Second, an independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate respondent's sentiments of apathy as related to watching *The Daily Show*. The test was not significant, $t(170) = .15$, $p = .88$. Third, an independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate respondent's sentiments of complacency as related to watching *The Colbert Report*. The test was not significant, $t(121) = 1.06$, $p = .30$. Finally, an independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate respondent's sentiments of apathy as related to watching *The Colbert Report*. The test was not significant, $t(121) = .46$, $p = .65$. Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Table 5.

T-Test Testing Hypotheses

Dependent variable/ independent variable	Mean (S.D)	t
<i>Complacency</i>		
Daily Show	2.96 (1.11)	.58
Colbert Report	2.98 (1.13)	.30
<i>Apathy</i>		
Daily Show	.53 (1.13)	.88
Colbert Report	2.36 (1.05)	.65

Results not significant

Hypothesis 4 predicted that high school students who frequently watch *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* tune in not only for the entertainment value, but because the shows put political events into context and give more relevance to the political novice. A multiple stepwise regression analysis was conducted to predict the overall *Daily Show* relevance index from age, gender and political ideology. The results of this analysis indicated that age, gender and political ideology accounted for a significant amount of *The Daily Show's* relevance variability, $R^2 = .41$, $F(4,124) = 21.70$, $p < .001$. This indicates that male participants ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .05$), those who indicated they have a more liberal political ideology ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$), and those who frequently

watched *The Daily Show* and gave high marks on *The Daily Show* index ($\beta = .51, p < .001$) had an effect on the overall relevance index.

Table 6.

Regressions Testing Hypotheses

Dependent variable/ independent variable	β	R^2	df	F
<i>Daily Show</i>				
Male participants	-.17	.09	(1,127)	12.04***
Liberal political ideology	.19	.18	(2,1260)	13.99***
High rating: DS credibility	.51	.41	(4,124)	21.70***

Note. Standardized betas and significant levels for r^2 are reported only for the whole model. Demographic controls are noted only where significant.

*** $p < .001$

A second multiple stepwise regression analysis was conducted to predict the overall *The Colbert Report* relevance index from age, gender and political ideology. The results of this analysis indicated that age, gender and political ideology accounted for a significant amount of *The Colbert Report's* relevance variability, $R^2 = .45, F(4,111) = 23.04, p < .001$. This indicates that male participants ($\beta = -.24, p < .01$), and those who frequently watched *The Colbert Report* and gave high marks on *The Colbert Report* index had an effect on the overall relevance index ($\beta = .54, p < .001$). These results confirmed hypothesis 4.

Table 7.

Regressions Testing Hypotheses

Dependent variable/ independent variable	β	R^2	df	F
<i>Colbert Report</i>				
Male participants	.24	.15	(1,114)	20.26**
High rating: DS credibility	.54	.45	(4,111)	23.04***

Note. Standardized betas and significant levels for r^2 are reported only for the whole model. Demographic controls are noted only where significant.

$p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Hypothesis 5 predicted that high school students who watch *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* versus those who are exposed to alternative programming would show an

increased involvement or desire for involvement in politics. An independent samples *t* test was conducted to test the hypothesis for responses on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. The test was not significant $t(121) = .61, p = .54$ for personal information efficacy towards involvement in politics. Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

Table 8.

T-Test Testing Hypotheses

Dependent variable/ independent variable	Mean (S.D)	<i>t</i>
<i>Personal Information Efficacy</i>		
Involvement	4.32 (1.27)	.61
<i>Results not significant</i>		

Summary of findings. Research question 1 asked how *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* affected high school students’ political self efficacy. The above findings indicate that these programs do indeed positively affect high school students’ political self efficacy. As the frequency with which students watch *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* increases, so too does their information efficacy. This may result in an increased sense of not only ability to participate in politics but an increased motivation to do so. The results also indicate that as students’ information efficacy rises, their internal political efficacy increases as well.

Research question 2 asked what aspects of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* make them appealing to high school students. Responses on a likert scale from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree” indicate that students enjoy entertaining news ($M = 5.25, SD = 1.54$), news that is in-depth ($M = 5.46, SD = 1.35$), and news that boasts argumentative discussions ($M = 5.18, SD = 1.40$). In addition, results from hypothesis 4 confirm that high school students enjoy these programs because they put political information into an understandable context and they give the topics they present more relevance to a political novice.

Discussion

This study sought to determine whether shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* affect high school student’s perceptions of politics. In particular, this study sought to determine if *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* affect high school students’ political efficacy, cynicism, skepticism, involvement, complacency, and apathy. In addition, this study examined whether cynicism and skepticism are different constructs. The results of the study indicated that these programs affect participant’s personal efficacy and internal political efficacy, but have little direct affect to a participant’s involvement, complacency and apathy. Interestingly, the results indicate that skepticism and cynicism are indeed separate constructs as indicated by Table 9 below, and contrary to some contemporary research, participants exposed to *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* did not respond with increased cynicism or skepticism as compared to their peers in the control group.

Table 9a.
Component Matrix

	Component
	1
Cynicism	.828
SkeptMedia	.560
SkeptPol	.871

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a 1 components extracted.

Table 9b.
Rotated Component Matrix

	Component		
	1	2	3
You can really trust news stories about politics.	-.029	-.139	.941
I have a critical attitude towards news media.	.736	.060	-.351

I think about statements made by governmental leaders before I accept or reject them as true.	.664	.159	.175
I usually question statements made by politicians.	.784	.309	-.005
Elections are about politicians competing to get elected.	.311	.676	-.133
Politicians are out of touch with life in the real world.	.030	.801	-.009
I always think twice about things politicians say.	.756	.147	-.091
Public officials seem to put their own best interests ahead of the public interest.	.199	.672	-.194
I have a critical attitude toward politicians.	.756	.215	-.010
It seems like politicians only care about special interests.	.240	.792	.053

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Students responded to questions of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*'s credibility on a seven-point likert scale from 1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree" based on how well the program keeps them informed, if the program is entertaining, if the program makes interesting political commentary, if the program makes interesting social commentary, how factual the news items on the show are, how interesting said news items are to them, reporter bias, and if the student received most of their news from these programs. The indices for *The Daily Show* ($M= 4.23$, $SD = 1.5$) and *The Colbert Report* ($M= 4.0$, $SD = 1.60$) both show students generally linger right in the middle, with some questions garnering lower scores ("I get most of my news from *The Colbert Report*"), ($M= 1.93$, $SD = 1.45$) than others ("*The Daily Show* is entertaining"), ($M= 5.62$, $SD = 1.73$). As such, this study also brought to light that high

school students watch these programs for reasons over and above entertainment – *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are able to put political events into contexts and scenarios that resonate with this age group. While many students acknowledged that *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* might not be the pinnacle of political news, these programs are able to inform while entertaining and can keep their attention through political and social commentary.

It is interesting to note that while contemporary research would support the five hypotheses of this study, that three of the hypotheses were not supported. While it is already noted that the researcher did not agree with the work of Baumgartner & Morris (2006) and hence, it was expected that hypothesis two would fail to garner support. Hypotheses three and five however, were indeed expected to hold but were not supported. Watching *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* did not significantly raise participant's sense of complacency or apathy toward the political process, not did it increase the participant's desire for involvement in politics. This may be due to a number of factors, chief among them the age of the participants. A majority of the studies the researcher used to design this experiment were from studies using participants in the 18 to 25-year-old age range. While it may seem to many people that 16.5 years or age is close to the voting age, it may not feel as such to those who are 16.5- years old. As a result, voting and any of the behaviors or sentiments associated with civic participation may very well be irrelevant to the average 16-year-old's daily behavior.

Another reason hypotheses three and five were not supported might be the reasons respondents said they watched news programs. On a likert scale from 1: strongly disagree, to 7: strongly agree, participants generally felt that for news to be news, it needed to be entertaining ($M= 5.25, SD= 1.54$), it needed to be in-depth ($M= 5.46, SD= 1.35$) and it needed to be argumentative ($M= 5.18, SD= 1.39$). While respondents overwhelmingly said *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* were entertaining ($M= 5.62, SD= 1.73$), they said they do not watch it for

news ($M= 2.18$, $SD= 1.79$). While this might be simply related to a social desirability to sound politically mature, this might also point to (high school) participants using *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* simply as a source of entertainment, where learning about the political climate is a by-product of watching, but not the intention of watching. Another interesting finding from this study is that boys were more affected by *The Daily Show* ($\beta =-.17$, $p<.05$) and *The Colbert Report* ($\beta =-.24$, $p<.01$) than were girls. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, a deeper look into how these differences might affect girl's future political behavior would be interesting and informative.

There are limitations of this study however, which necessitate a careful interpretation of its results. First, it should be noted that the participants in this study live in an education-saturated environment and are generally part of a more privileged demographic, thus these students' responses might not be as generalizable to high school students as a whole. In addition, the students were only exposed to the stimulus once for approximately 17 minutes. It is likely that in order to really see if *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* affect students' involvement, complacency and apathy, that the study be longitudinal.

Another aspect to take into consideration is the age of the participants in this study. With an average age of 16.51 years, many of the participants are likely to see voting as a far-off task with little relevance to their daily lives. This may explain why the apathy ($a = .57$), complacency ($a = .51$), and involvement ($a = .65$), indices held such low alphas. Without the impetus to involve oneself in politics, neither apathetic nor complacent citizens would exhibit the information-seeking behaviors reflective of highly involved citizens (Tan, 1980).

An additional explanation of the limitations of this study can be found within the demographic characteristics of this population. A majority of the students who participated in the study are from a small college town, where many of their parents hold positions at the

university; this can diminish the generalizability of the study for a couple of reasons. First of all, these students generally come from middle to higher-income families ($M = \$65,500$, $SD = \$30,000$). As these adolescents are from households with more income, it is likely there are more resources for learning and a lesser emphasis placed on learning from television. Second, on a scale from 1 “I hope to complete 11th grade or less” to 7 “I hope to complete a post-graduate degree” many of the students responded that they held hopes for college and even post-graduate degrees ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 2.08$).

Another explanation for the limitations can be related to a social desirability effect, in which the students desired to appear politics and news savvy. On a scale of sentiments about American politics, with 1 being completely positive to 7 being completely negative, respondents from this study generally saw American politics in a positive light ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .86$). They also claimed on a scale from 1 “use once in a while” to 4 “every time it airs/is printed” to use various media outlets on a regular basis: broadcast television news ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.23$), the news in newspapers ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.41$), and news radio ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 1.41$).

Finally, due to experimenter error, the experiment failed to measure knowledge as a result of watching *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. While knowledge questions are in the pre-test, they are not in the post-test. This limits the scope of the study in that there is no way of telling if knowledge levels were affected by the stimulus.

Despite these limitations, this study provides interesting findings and indicates directions for future research. As noted above, a longitudinal examination of the same study would most likely generate more interesting findings. While some effect was found from watching *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, this may have been due to the student watching the program on their own time. With repeated exposure, this study might find more of an impact on variables such as apathy, complacency and involvement. In addition, it may be helpful to run focus-

groups as an additional component of the study before implementing the survey experiment. This may be a way of really fine-tuning the types of questions that will turn high school students on.

Political disaffection is a hotly debated topic, and in some instances programs such as these are considered to be a negative force (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006), however, this study found that *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* do not affect variables traditionally linked to negative (if any) political behavior. On the contrary, these programs seem to hold the seeds with which high school students come to understand and participate in politics. With a more longitudinal study, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* could become a vehicle for positive political socialization – a stepping stone to make the leap from adolescent to adult civic participation easier and possibly more permanent.

Theoretical implications. Chaffee, Ward & Tipton (1970) found that young people rate the media as more influential than parents, teachers or peers, and as such, media outlets fill in the gaps between what they learn at home and in the classroom. While this study did not prove an increase in knowledge from participants who watched *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, the results indicate an increased sense of personal and political information efficacy. These findings add to the theoretical work on political socialization in that these programs may be giving high school students the building blocks they need to become active participants in the public affairs in their communities. Programs such as these have the potential to have a great impact on the political socialization of high school students. *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* has become a hot destination for anyone who wants to sell books or seem hip, from presidential candidates to military dictators (Dowd, 2006), and high school students are tuning in.

The results from this study ultimately indicate that high school students use media to the extent that it will keep their attention via entertainment or relevant commentary. Despite the

findings of previous researchers, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* do not increase a student's feeling of cynicism or skepticism. These programs do not necessarily motivate students to become active participants in the political arena, but they do create a sense of efficacy within the student, which is a major predictor of (later) political involvement. High school student participants of this study indicate that watching these programs increase their sense of ability to affect public affairs decisions and their value to the political system as a whole. High school students want their news but they want their entertainment too.

While the results of this study may be limited, they do point toward some promising future behaviors from these participants. Since political efficacy is a big predictor of political involvement, the likelihood of this study's participants not only voting, but actively seeking out information about politics is high.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1

Indices for those watching The Daily Show and The Colbert Report	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Efficacy	63	20.65	5.24
Personal Efficacy	67	3.91	1.26
Cynicism	67	4.91	.96
Involvement	67	4.32	1.27
Skepticism toward the media	66	3.77	.84
Skepticism toward politics	67	4.88	.97
Complacency	67	3.16	1.13
Apathy	67	2.54	1.05

Indices for those watching Sponge Bob Square Pants	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Efficacy	53	21.50	4.01
Personal Efficacy	56	4.13	1.26
Cynicism	53	4.98	.95
Involvement	56	4.18	1.26
Skepticism toward the media	56	3.73	.93
Skepticism toward politics	55	4.64	1.02
Complacency	56	2.95	1.08
Apathy	56	2.45	.97

APPENDIX B

QUEST. ID # _____

News Media Effects Survey 2006
Edward R. Murrow School of Communication
Washington State University

1. Thinking about American politics generally, check a space between each of these adjectives below to indicate how you would describe American politics. For example, if you thought that that American politics were “somewhat” accessible you would check the space between:

Accessible x Not Accessible
Very Quite Somewhat Neither Somewhat Quite Very

Please check your answers below. American politics in general are:
Very Quite Somewhat Neither Somewhat Quite Very

Easy to Follow	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	Hard to Follow
Engaging	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	Not Engaging
Interesting	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	Not Interesting
Fair	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	Unfair
Corrupt	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	Ethical
Honest	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	Dishonest
Important To me	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	Not Important to me

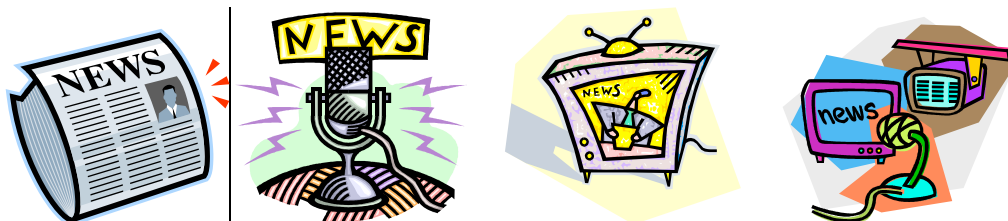


2. How accurate do you consider the news content from the following sources on a scale of 1 to 7 with one being very inaccurate to seven being very accurate?

	Inaccurate						Accurate
Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Television news	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Other Television Programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Traditional Internet news sites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Blogs and other Internet news sources	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Magazines	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Your Teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Your Parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Your friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. How much does effort it take for you to get access to the following news sources on a scale of 1 to 7 with one very little to seven being a lot?

	A Little						A Lot
Television	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The Internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Magazines	1	2	3	4	5	6	7



4. For each of the following questions, please circle the answer that rates how you feel in regards to *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. Please circle only one *carefully* and remember that there is no right or wrong answer.

<i>The Daily Show with Jon Stewart...</i>	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Keeps me informed about American Politics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Is entertaining	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Makes interesting political commentary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Makes interesting social commentary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Presents factual news	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Presents interesting news items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Presents biased news items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I get most of my news from <i>The Daily Show</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

5. For each of the following questions, please circle the answer that rates how you feel in regards to *The Colbert Report*. Please circle only one *carefully* and remember that there is no right or wrong answer.

<i>The Colbert Report...</i>	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Keeps me informed about American Politics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Is entertaining	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Makes interesting political commentary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Makes interesting social commentary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Presents factual news	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Presents interesting news items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Presents biased news items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I get most of my news from <i>The Colbert Report</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8



6. For each of the following questions, please circle the answer that rates how often you use the following news sources. Please circle only one and remember that there is no right or wrong answer.

Programs	Once in a while	1-2 times per week	3-5 times per week	Every day it is on TV	Never
<i>The Colbert Report</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>The Daily Show with Jon Stewart</i>	1	2	3	4	5
Watch broadcast news (ABC, NBC, CBS, News Hour, Fox News, CNN, etc)	1	2	3	4	5
The <i>news</i> in the newspaper	1	2	3	4	5
Listen to radio news	1	2	3	4	5
Look for online news	1	2	3	4	5

Please answer the following questions:

7. Which job or political office is now held by Dick Cheney?

_____ President _____ Vice President _____ Secretary of Defense

8. Who is the U.S. Secretary of State?

_____ Condoleezza Rice _____ Colin Powell _____ Donald Rumsfeld

9. Who is the Florida Senator who is in trouble for sending inappropriate messages to congressional pages?

_____ Tom Foley _____ Jack Abramoff _____ Mark Foley

10. Which of the following is a Washington state senator running for re-election?

_____ Maria Cantwell _____ Mike McGavick _____ Patty Murray

11. On a scale of 1-7, please indicate whether you strongly disagree or strongly agree with the following statements about elections. The lower the number, the more you disagree, the higher the number, the more you agree. Please circle only one *carefully* and remember that there is no right or wrong answer.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree	Don't Know
I can make a difference if I participate in elections.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Voting gives people an effective way to influence what the government does.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
When I am able to vote, my vote will make a difference.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
My friends are interested in this year's mid-term elections.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Participating in elections is more trouble than it is worth.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I feel that I am a well-qualified person to participate in politics.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
If a friend asked me about the election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I think I am better informed about politics than most people my age.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I feel I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Elections are the way that average people get their say in government.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
It would be difficult for someone like me to make a real difference in my community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I expect that candidates will think my vote is important when I am 18-25-years-old.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I look for a candidate who has young people holding some major positions in his/her campaign.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

12. On a scale of 1-7, please indicate whether you strongly disagree or strongly agree with the following statements about elections. The lower the number, the more you disagree, the higher the number, the more you agree. Please circle only one *carefully* and remember that there is no right or wrong answer.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree	Don't Know
I would like to see a candidate who speaks to issues of particular concern to young people, like affordable college.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Voting takes too much time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
The country will be fine whether or not I vote.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I'm interested in election information.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
The country will be fine no matter who gets elected.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I would like to see a candidate who takes issues to the students like calling for a debate at a local high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I plan to vote in the next presidential election.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8



13. On a scale of 1-7, please indicate whether you strongly disagree or strongly agree with the following statements about the news. The lower the number, the more you disagree, the higher the number, the more you agree. Please circle only one *carefully* and remember that there is no right or wrong answer.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Most news stories about the election have been accurate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I use news stories in the media to help me make decisions about politics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
The media do a good job of keeping me informed about the elections	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
When I hear about something new on TV, I actively seek more information about that topic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
You can really trust news stories about politics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I like my news to be funny	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I like my news to be entertaining	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I like my news to be in-depth	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I like my news to have argumentative discussions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I seek out additional information to confirm or disconfirm things I learn from a news story	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I have a critical attitude toward news media	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I base decisions about politics on information presented by <i>The Daily Show</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I base decisions about politics on information presented by <i>The Colbert Report</i> .	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
The news media do a good job of keeping me informed about the elections.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

14. Please indicate which of the following media materials you have read, listened to, or watched within the past week (check all that apply).

The *news* in newspapers _____ Radio news _____
 (Politics, the front section)

Newsletters _____ Television news _____

News magazines _____ News online _____

15. On a scale of 1-7, please indicate whether you strongly disagree or strongly agree with the following statements about politics and politicians. The lower the number, the more you disagree, the higher the number, the more you agree. Please circle only one *carefully* and remember that there is no right or wrong answer.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Keeping up on political issues takes up too much time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
It seems most politicians have my best interest at heart	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Politics are not relevant to my life right now	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Most politicians are honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Public officials seem to put their own interest ahead of the public interest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I think about statements made by governmental leaders before I accept or reject them as accurate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I have a critical attitude toward politicians	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I usually question statements made by politicians	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Elections are about politicians competing to get elected	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Politicians are out of touch with life in the real world.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

15. On a scale of 1-7, please indicate whether you strongly disagree or strongly agree with the following statements about politics and politicians. The lower the number, the more you disagree, the higher the number, the more you agree. Please circle only one *carefully* and remember that there is no right or wrong answer.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Staying informed about the government is too much trouble.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I always think twice about things politicians say.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
It seems like politicians only care about special interests.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8



...Just a few questions to go...

16. How often do you talk about politics, government or current events with your parents?

_____ Often _____ Sometimes _____ Not very often/rarely _____ Never

17. What would you say reflects your parents voting habits, they:

_____ Vote every election _____ Most elections _____ Only in important elections

_____ Rarely _____ Not at all _____ Not sure

18. What is the highest level of schooling you expect to complete? Please be sure to check only one category.

11th grade or less _____
High school degree, or equivalent _____
A technical degree _____
Some college _____
An associates degree _____
A bachelor's degree _____
A post-graduate degree _____
Don't know _____

19. What is the highest level of schooling your parent or primary guardian completed? Please be sure to check only one category.

11th grade or less _____
High school degree, or equivalent _____
A technical degree _____
Some college _____
An associates degree _____
A bachelor's degree _____
A post-graduate degree _____
Don't know _____

20. Please indicate which political description best-fits your ideology:

- Strong Republican _____
- Not so strong Republican _____
- Independent, leans Republican _____
- Independent _____
- Independent, leans Democrat _____
- Not so strong Democrat _____
- Strong Democrat _____

Please tell me a few things about yourself:

21. How old are you? _____ years

22. Are you _____ male or _____ female?

23. What year in high school are you? _____ year

24. You are: (please check all that apply)

- _____ non-Latino Caucasian
- _____ Latino/ Latino American
- _____ Native American
- _____ African American
- _____ Asian/ Asian American
- _____ Other: _____

25. Please indicate your family's annual household income to the best of your knowledge.

- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|
| Under \$20,000 | _____ | \$61,000 – 70,000 | _____ |
| \$21,000 – 30,000 | _____ | \$71,000 – 80,000 | _____ |
| \$31,000 – 40,000 | _____ | \$81,000 – 90,000 | _____ |
| \$41,000 – 50,000 | _____ | \$91,000 – 100,000 | _____ |
| \$51,000 – 60,000 | _____ | Over \$100,000 | _____ |

Don't know _____

Thanks for participating!

APPENDIX C

Daily Show and Colbert Report vignettes

Vignette 1:

<u>Date aired:</u>	<u>DS/CR:</u>	<u>Title of scene (and type of scene):</u>
7/31/06	CR	Ned Lamont interview (Sen./Gov. interview)
9/14/06	DS	Matt Lauer interviews Bush (critique of Administration)
10/4/06	CR	Sen. Byron Dorgan interview (book interview)
9/26/06	DS	Pervez Musharif interview (prominent politician interview)
9/14/06	CR	Sen. Allen and “the ethnics” (comment: state of politics)
10/10/06	DS	comment on the “photo op” (international)

Vignette 2:

<u>Date aired:</u>	<u>DS/CR:</u>	<u>Title of scene (and type of scene):</u>
10/12/06	DS	“The stakes are high” (critique of Administration)
10/16/06	CR	“The Word:” Russian Dolls (comment: state of politics)
9/18/06	DS	Bill Clinton interview (prominent politician interview)
10/5/06	CR	commentary on airport security (homeland security)
10/16/06	DS	commentary on DC scandals (critique of Administration)
10/12/06	CR	commentary on gay republicans (Sen./Gov. comment)

Vignette 3:

<u>Date aired:</u>	<u>DS/CR:</u>	<u>Title of scene (and type of scene):</u>
8/9/06	CR	“Take note Lieberman!” (Sen./Gov. comment)
10/5/06	DS	Bush’s “comma” comment (critique of Administration)
10/9/06	CR	commentary on Kim Jung Il (international)
9/25/06	DS	Pat Buchanan interview (prominent politician interview)
10/18/06	CR	“The Word:” The Baker Report (comment: state of politics)
9/20/06	DS	comment on UN General Assembly (international)

APPENDIX D

Descriptive statistics for variables used in post-test analysis: Measures and Indices	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Index α
Efficacy (Internal Political Efficacy) (5)				.78
I can make a difference if I participate in elections.	170	5.32	1.51	
Voting gives people an effective way to influence what the government does.	172	4.95	1.49	
When I am able to vote, my vote will make a difference.	169	4.96	1.68	
Elections are the way that average people get a day in government.	169	5.11	1.35	
I can make a difference if I participate in elections.	167	4.94	1.50	
Personal (Information) Efficacy (5)				.81
I feel I am a well-qualified person to participate in elections.	165	4.36	1.65	
If a friend asked about the election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.	171	3.83	1.75	
I think I am better informed about politics than most people my age.	170	3.66	1.77	
I feel I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.	170	4.58	1.64	
I expect the candidates will think my vote is important when I am 18-25 -years old.	163	4.60	1.70	
Cynicism (4)				.67
Public officials seem to put their own interest ahead of the public interest.	159	4.67	1.40	
I have a critical attitude toward politicians.	158	4.99	1.42	
It seems like politicians only care about special interests.	156	4.66	1.37	
Most politicians are honest.	168	2.55	1.30	

Continued on the next page...

Skepticism toward Politics (6)	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	.71
It seems that most politicians have my best interest at heart.	164	2.57	1.15	
I think about statements made by governmental leaders before I accept or reject them as true.	165	5.00	1.37	
I usually question statements made by politicians.	167	4.95	1.50	
Elections are about politicians competing to get elected.	169	4.74	1.78	
Politicians are out of touch with life in the real world.	155	3.98	1.50	
I always think twice about what politicians say.	170	4.71	1.54	
Skepticism toward Media (3)				.86
You can usually trust news stories about politics.	168	2.94	1.36	
I have a critical attitude toward news media.	161	4.61	1.66	
News stories about the election have been accurate.	142	4.01	1.25	
Involvement (4)				.65
I am interested in election information.	171	4.40	1.69	
I plan to vote in the next presidential election.	160	5.67	2.12	
When I hear about something new on TV, I actively seek out more information about that topic.	171	3.36	1.65	
I seek out additional information to confirm or disconfirm things I hear in a news story.	169	3.73	1.66	
Complacency (4)				.51
The country will be fine whether or not I vote.	165	3.17	1.79	
The country will be fine no matter who gets elected.	169	2.02	1.32	
Keeping up on political issues takes up too much time.	168	3.44	1.43	
Politics are not relevant to my life right now.	171	3.37	1.91	
Apathy (3)				.57
Participating in elections is more trouble than it is worth.	167	2.43	1.50	
Voting takes too much time.	165	2.24	1.31	
Staying informed about the government is too much trouble.	170	2.84	1.40	