

LIVE FROM NEW YORK AND STRAIGHT TO WASHINGTON: AN EXPLORATIVE
STUDY OF INTERNET AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF THE PORTRAYALS
AND APPEARANCES OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

ON SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE

Paige Thomason Miller, BA

Thesis Prepared for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2012

APPROVED:

R. Steve Craig, Major Professor
Harry Benshoff, Committee Member
Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha, Committee
Member

Sam Sauls, Director of Graduate Studies in
the Department of Radio, Television
and Film

Alan Albarran, Chair of the Department of
Radio, Television and Film

James D. Meernik, Acting Dean of the
Toulouse Graduate School

Miller, Paige Thomason. Live from New York and straight to Washington: An explorative study of Internet audience perceptions of the portrayals and appearances of presidential candidates on *Saturday Night Live*. Master of Arts (Radio, Television and Film), May 2012, 110 pp., references, 122 titles.

This thesis examines if and how the Internet viewers of *Saturday Night Live* skits were influenced by the video skits. The viewers' online comments were read, categorized and analyzed for content to explore and discuss how the viewers "read" the text of the online video skits. Each video in which candidates John McCain, Sarah Palin, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama appeared is summarized and analyzed through viewers' comments. A sample of skits including actors' portrayals of McCain, Palin, Clinton, Obama and Joe Biden is also summarized and analyzed to find and discuss how the viewers' perceptions were influenced by the portrayals.

Copyright 2012

by

Paige Thomason Miller

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapters	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study	
2. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Humor and Politics	
Television and Politics	
Television Receptions Studies	
Pre-1975 Political Comedy on Radio and Television	
<i>Saturday Night Live</i> and Politics	
3. METHODOLOGY	31
4. ANALYSIS OF ONLINE COMMENTS REGARDING CANDIDATES’ APPEARANCES	35
John McCain- 5/17/08, 11/1/08, 11/3/08	
Sarah Palin- 10/18/08, 11/3/08	
Hillary Clinton- 3/1/08	
Barack Obama- 11/3/07	
5. ANALYSIS OF ONLINE COMMENTS REGARDING PORTRAYALS OF CANDIDATES IN SKITS.....	58
John McCain- Darrell Hammond	
Sarah Palin- Tina Fey	
Hillary Clinton- Amy Poehler	
Barack Obama- Fred Armisen	
Joe Biden- Jason Sudekis	
6. DISCUSSION.....	98
REFERENCES	

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 2008 election broke records and crossed boundaries in the political sphere. A woman became a major presidential contender for the first time in history, a woman became a vice presidential candidate for only the second time, a white man ran to be the oldest president to take office, and a black man was elected to the highest office in America. These candidates achieved these feats in many different ways, but one method they employed was to appear on the comedy show *Saturday Night Live* (hereafter *SNL*). Senators Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, John McCain, and Governor Sarah Palin appeared on the show at least once to take part in the fun. There were also countless sketches, or skits, on *SNL* for the two years preceding Election Day on November 4, 2008. These sketches made fun of each candidate and many other political front-runners. Campaigns' use of the Internet also reached a new level with an estimated 83% of all age groups using the Internet on a regular basis as a source for campaign news, up 40% from 2004 (Kohut, January 11, 2008). Some of the political primary debates even featured videos posted on YouTube of citizens asking questions. The new way Americans access election campaign information requires a new method in which to analyze and study the way Americans perceive the candidates.

SNL has a long history of political comedy and has featured many impersonations of politicians, including presidential and vice presidential candidates. From Chevy Chase's notoriously bumbling Gerald Ford to Dan Aykroyd's take on Jimmy Carter to Dana Carvey's "read my lips" George H. W. Bush to Phil Hartman's Bill Clinton to Will Ferrell's George W. Bush and Darrell Hammond's Bill Clinton, Al Gore and Dick Cheney, the elected officials were represented for most of the show's 35 year history. David Spade's Ross Perot and Norm

MacDonald's Bob Dole, among others, even represented the unelected challengers. The bar was set in the first season when Chevy Chase spoofed President Ford in 1975 with his tripping and pratfalls (*Saturday Night Live Transcripts*). There were a few years, however, when the "Not Ready for Primetime Players" were not in top performance. The Ronald Reagan skits have all but disappeared from online videos, compilation shows and most viewers' minds. Most fans and viewers consider the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s to be the worst years of *SNL*, and in fact, NBC programmer Brandon Tartikoff cancelled the show at one point in the 1980s, but changed his mind at the last minute (Shales & Miller, 2002). By the end of the 1990s, however, the show was looking up and creator/producer Lorne Michaels and his cast and crew are credited with resurrecting the show once more with the help of the "exploitable absurdities of politics" (Shales & Miller, 2002, p.12). From Dan Quayle's and George W. Bush's malapropisms to Clinton's Whitewater and Lewinsky scandals and Al Gore's "lock box," *SNL* had plenty of material and utilized the best writers on the show in years to take advantage at the turn of the millennium.

SNL's parodies of the 2008 primaries, debates and election were by no means a new idea for the show, having employed similar sketches for at least the previous two elections. However, given the perceived importance of this election, as well as the lack of any incumbent, presidential or vice presidential, in the race for the first time since 1952, the 2008 election political coverage on *SNL* seemed to be more pervasive than ever. These reasons, as well as a heightened awareness of issues such as the economic recession and the war in Iraq, may have led some viewers to be influenced by the show. Some viewers report through online comments and responses to the show that *Saturday Night Live*'s coverage of the 2008 Presidential election affected their perceptions, beliefs, ideas and even some votes.

Purpose of Study

There has been interest in the effects of television on politics since the introduction of the technology to the election process in 1948 (Kraus & Davis, 1976). Humor as a political and rhetorical strategy dates back to the ancient Greeks (Bippus, 2007; Berger, 1987). However, with the saturation of media in American culture, researchers have a renewed interest in the effects of television and humor on politics. Political science and communication researchers have found a need to study political communication from a different perspective. Researchers need to step beyond the traditional theory areas and include new technology such as YouTube, entertainment shows such as *The Daily Show*, and specifically the underdeveloped topic of political satire, found in *SNL*, and the political effects of this type of media in new studies and theories of politics (Holbert, 2005; Holbert, Lambe, Dudo & Carlton, 2007; Holbert & Geidner, 2009). Holbert also argues that the “messages being offered via entertainment outlets are qualitatively distinct from those provided through news” (Holbert, 2005, p. 438). This thesis explores the idea that “political communication scholars should not focus solely on the videos being offered on [YouTube and the Internet], but all the additional material” such as viewers’ comments because it provides “important contextual information concerning what other people think of a particular message” as well as opinions and perceptions (Holbert & Geidner, 2009, p. 350).

The purpose of this thesis is to study the ways in which *SNL* parodied the candidates, how candidates employed the strategy of appearing on the show during the 2008 election campaign, and how these skits may have influenced viewers’ perceptions of the candidates. The thesis discusses the target of, and motive for, humor by the candidate or skit, and possible attributive reasoning from the viewers’ comments. A content analysis was performed on the viewers’ comments to study their point of view, and the impact of the skits on their ideas, if any.

The paper also considers previous campaigns on *SNL* and other political satire outlets in relation to this election season. The media has portrayed this election as the most important in modern history, and this study explores whether a television sketch comedy show could have affected the outcome in any way.

Traditional news media, magazine shows, and even competing networks, as well as other comedy shows, played and discussed the *SNL* skits for a variety of reasons, including entertainment. For example, an estimated 86% of Americans heard about Vice Presidential Candidate Sarah Palin's appearance on *SNL* at least a little bit, after her appearance in late October 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2008). The main purpose of doing a content analysis is to examine the role of the viewers and gain insight into how viewers receive and understand the text of the skits, and how they take pleasure in watching them (Allen, 1992). The viewership and knowledge-seeking methods for candidates markedly changed in 2008 from previous elections, although the importance of the role of the Internet and elections was somewhat realized in the 2000 and 2004 elections. By 2008, 83% of all age groups used the Internet on a regular basis as a source for campaign news, up 40% from 2004. Twenty-four percent of all age groups watched at least some online video about the campaign including speeches, debates and interviews, with 18-29 year-olds leading at 41% (Kohut, January 11, 2008). During the presidential primaries in 2007-2008, CNN even partnered with YouTube to nationally televise debates in which citizens posted video questions to the Internet. The new way of accessing information requires a new way to study viewers' reception of the content and their perceptions of the candidates. Therefore, the videos, skits and comments from *SNL* online are somewhat demonstrative of how Americans learned about and perceived the candidates. There has also been debate surrounding whether or not the show influenced voters, and how *SNL* played a role in the election. It is impossible to

determine if *SNL* influenced the outcome of the election, but it is possible to study the perceived influence of the political sketches on the viewers based on their own comments.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Humor and Politics

Just as *SNL* and politics was not a new match, neither was the match of humor, comedy and/or parody and politics. Humor as a rhetorical strategy dates back to early Greek and Roman philosophers such as Quintilian, (Bippus, 2007) Plato and Aristotle (Berger, 1987). These philosophers were the first to posit the idea that laughing usually occurs at the expense of others that are less fortunate (Berger, 1987) and in 1651 Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan* (1651/1996) that this laughing at others who are inferior builds self-confidence and makes one feel superior. Freud theorized that a scenario will be considered amusing if it parodies in a somewhat exaggerated, but not over-exaggerated, form something to which the participant/reader/viewer can relate from their position in life. The uses of humor, according to Freud, are as a method of social bonding, use as a defense mechanism, and to lessen the perceived seriousness of the situation (Freud, 1923; Lewis & Niewouldt, 1993).

There is evidence that humor is an effective strategy for speakers to use. Charles Gruner (1970) found that speakers who used humor received higher character ratings than those who did not, and the use of humor has been identified as an important aspect in “good” leadership (Lemer, 2003; Avolio, Howell & Sosik, 1999; Decker & Rotando, 2001). One study shows a positive effect of a speaker’s use of self-disparaging humor on audience perceptions (Chang & Gruner, 1981) and several studies suggest that people prefer candidates from the opposite party who use humor over their own party’s candidates (Priest, 1966; Priest & Abrahams, 1970). Grotjahn (1987) makes a comment on self-deprecating Jewish jokes that, although none of the candidates are Jewish, still pertains to politicians’ motives for appearing on a show like *SNL* to

make fun of themselves. He states: “We know ourselves better than anybody else. We know our weaknesses and our faults, as we know our strengths” (Grotjahn, 1987, p. 98). This method could also produce some sought after votes because women find this kind of humor more appealing than men (Tamborini & Zillman, 1981). The quality of the humor is not the only factor shaping reactions to humor. The reason the viewer believes the speaker chose to use it is also a major factor in how the viewer responds. Bippus found that a candidate’s humor was considered more effective when it was directed at himself instead of his opponent. Participants preferred the self-disparaging form because they attribute the motives to mood improvement and sharing common ground with the audience, whereas the humor directed towards a candidate’s opponent was attributed more to hostility (Bippus, 2007).

Satirical humor and parody in political communication is an underdeveloped field of research (Holbert, 2005), but there is quite a bit of work on late night talk shows such as *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *The Late Show with David Letterman*, and now even *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* (Holbert, 2005; Holbert, Lambe, Dudo & Carlton, 2007; Holbert & Geidner, 2009; Baumgartner & Morris 2006, 2008; Colletta, 2009). Shows like *Letterman* and *Leno* tend to focus more on the candidates’ personal qualities than actual policy stances, but the political satirical messages embodied by *SNL* are much more complex because audience members must be engaged to understand the meaning of the jokes and to take away something meaningful (Holbert, 2005; Holbert & Geidner, 2009; Young, 2004). There is also a need to question how much political content the viewer is expecting to see when they tune into an entertainment show (Holbert, 2005). Entertainment could be more persuasive than the direct address of news shows because of audience members’ connections with the characters or TV personalities, their level of enjoyment of the content and their involvement in

the content. The entertainment content reduces the individual's resistance to persuasion because it is more "subtle" than direct political message, and they are less likely to put up resistance than when they realize they are being targeted by persuasion attempts (Holbert & Geidner, 2009; Baumgartner & Morris, 2008).

Television and Politics

Before television, there was an interest in the effects of radio on politics. The active electorate increased from 39% to 62% during the early years of radio. Not all of the rise can be explained by radio alone, but it increased the President's direct address to the American public, like Franklin D. Roosevelt's "fire-side chats," and lessened the dependence on traditional news outlets (Bartlett, 1947). One study during the 1940 presidential election showed that 38% of participants said radio and radio news was more important in influencing the voters' choice, opposed to only 23% who said newspapers. Of the people changing their vote to the Democrat Roosevelt, the majority said radio was the cause. Scholars in the 1940s found that radio news commentaries increased the overall public and civic awareness of listeners, and mostly of young people, lower income and rural families (Lazarsfeld, 1944). In the same way as television is now criticized, radio news was also criticized because the listeners might "know" what was going on, but it was not known if they "understood" it (Bartlett, 1947).

There has been interest in the effects of television on politics since the introduction of the technology to the election process in 1948 (Kraus & Davis, 1976). In the same ways radio news had in the past, the first televised presidential debates had a measurable effect on voter perceptions of both John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. In one test on voting intentions there was a significant amount of crystallization of undecided voters to Kennedy after watching the

debate on TV with over 80% of all changes benefiting Kennedy. Political theorists attribute this to Kennedy's healthy and youthful appearance on camera compared to Nixon's uneasiness and sweating – characteristics that had previously not been a factor on radio debates (Lang & Lang, 1984).

One question that has arisen in the age of television newscasts is whether television coverage inflates the importance of political candidates' appearances. Political strategist and advisor David L. Garth states, "The television coverage by definition is not meaningless [...] the fact that they are there and it is on the air makes it important." He goes on to say that people have a problem with a "non-event that becomes an event with television coverage, even though it says it is meaningless" (Linsky, 1983, p. 80). Although Garth was talking about serious news coverage of a candidate, any appearance of a candidate could be seen as becoming an "event" and therefore becomes important. Ithiel de Sola Pool wrote these foreshadowing comments in 1959 about the effects of television on politics:

Most political scientists believe...that with the use of radio and television and the decline of party machines and political fervor, the direct impact of the media is increasing and that of opinion leaders declining...There is little doubt that the effect of television will be profound. To say something about the specific quality of its impact is a challenge to students of communication. (Pool, 1959, pp. 239, 242)

The days of the all-important news anchor are over. No longer do Americans get their political information solely from the evening news. By February 2000, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press reported that 47% of people under 30 were "informed at least occasionally" about the campaign or candidates by late-night talk shows, and in January 2004 they repeated the survey, this time asking if the respondent had "learned something" from comedy shows. Twenty-one percent of those under 30 reported learning something from programs such as *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show* (Pew Research Center, 2004). In

2008, the numbers rose to 27% of those under 30 learning about the campaign from comedy shows at least sometimes. Even 36% of people over 30 admit to at least sometimes using comedy shows to learn about the campaigns. The Internet is by far the number one source for people under 30 to research candidates and election news, but 83% of all age groups use the Internet on a regular basis as a source for campaign news, which is 40% more than just four years prior in 2004. Twenty-four percent of all age groups watched at least some online video about the campaign, including speeches, debates and interviews, with 18-29 year-olds leading at 41%, followed by 28% of 30-39 year-olds, and 20% of 40-49 year olds (Kohut, January 11, 2008). By 2006, 21% of Americans of all ages reported watching *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* at least sometimes, marking a noticeable rise from only 11% just four years earlier (Pew Research Center, 2006). The pervasiveness of politically oriented comedy shows like *The Daily Show* and its spinoff *The Colbert Report*, along with more traditional late night shows such as *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *The Late Show with David Letterman* have sparked a new trend in research, both on the communication and the political fronts.

During the presidential campaign in 1992, candidates began to appear regularly on entertainment-based shows, in addition to the traditional news programs, as an outlet to bypass the traditional gatekeepers and the filters of journalists to speak directly to the electorate (Patterson, 1998). Bill Clinton made a memorable appearance on *The Arsenio Hall Show* complete with a saxophone performance. That trend of politicians taking political humorists more seriously came a long way by the 2004 election when Senator John Edwards formally announced his presidential candidacy on *The Daily Show*, followed by hopefuls Dick Gephardt, Dennis Kucinich, Joseph Lieberman, Howard Dean and eventual Democratic Party nominee John Kerry all of whom made appearances on *The Daily Show*. Riding the same trend, Senator

John McCain announced his intention to run in 2008 on *David Letterman* (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; 2008).

Politicians are increasingly crossing the lines from traditional news media to television comedy shows. It has been a good strategy in the past for some, and not so good for others. One of the main motivators for the trend of politics and television away from hard news programs to more soft news and late night comedy programs is the politicians' desire to maintain a presence in the popular conscience of the nation and the fact they will do about anything for a chance to be seen at the cutting edge of entertainment (Rackaway, Smith & Anderson, 2003). Baum posits that the candidates view these appearances as an opportunity to show the audience the 'real' person they are- as a relaxed citizen with their own personalities to talk about 'normal' everyday subjects such as their families (Baum, 2005). There is also strong evidence to support the argument that when humor is used as the method to deliver messages in a less direct way, the message is more persuasive and memorable (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Gruner, 1970; Lemer, 2003; Avolio et al., 1999; Decker & Rotando, 2001).

From the civic perspective, the influences of shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, along with more traditional "soft news" programming like *Larry King Live* and *Oprah* and other network and cable magazine shows, have been mixed. Some researchers have argued that soft news shows like these overemphasize trivial events, downplay significant issues, oversimplify complex events, and inflate viewers' sense of their personal political knowledge, thus jeopardizing the democratic process (Fallows, 1996; Kalb 2001; Patterson 2000, Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Hollander, 1995). Lisa Colletta found that the amount of attention the broadcast and cable news media pay to shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* and the way politicians push to appear on the show trivializes the seriousness of both the

politicians and the satire “turning everything into one big meta-joke” (2009). However, Chaffee, Zhao and Leshner (1994) found that the amount of time spent watching these shows positively correlated with knowledge of candidate issues, and McLeod et al. (1996) found that the shows were also effective in producing campaign interest in voters. There may even be a subsection of viewers who are more prone to influence. Baum (2003, 2005) argues that soft news programs actually create a more knowledgeable electorate by teaching viewers who would not otherwise watch hard news, and he demonstrates that presidential candidates’ appearances on entertainment-based shows during the 2000 campaign influenced the perceptions of the candidates, especially in the less-knowledgeable viewers. Young (2004) also found that only those with previously low political knowledge actually shift their perceptions of a candidate in tune with the jokes to which they are exposed, and one study suggests that the viewers who become most attached to the satirical message of *The Daily Show* were the viewers who “perceive themselves to be politically incompetent and ineffective” (Holbert, Lambe, Dudo & Carlton, 2007).

Television Reception Studies

The effect of visual media on viewers has been the subject of researchers since the invention of film. Theories of semiotics, structuralism, and apparatus theory have all been introduced to examine how humans understand the language and symbolism of film (Allen, 1992; Stam, 2000; Stam & Miller, 2000). These ideas all came to a head in the 1980s and 1990s when the cultural studies theorists became more interested in different forms of spectatorship, the way different people read texts differently, and the interaction between texts, spectators and cultures (Allen, 1992; Stam & Miller, 2000; Stam, 2000). There are three processes viewers use

to understand a text's meaning. These readings come from the viewer decoding the text that the producer encoded with meaning (Stam, 2000; Hall, 1980). First, dominant or preferred readings are when the viewer understands the meaning of the text, in this case a skit or appearance, in the way the producers intended. For example, when John McCain appeared on *SNL* before Election Day he wanted to promote himself as a candidate and come across as an average, funny guy. A dominant, or preferred reading, of his appearance would be if a viewer believed he was an average, funny guy, a good candidate for President, and perhaps even voted for him. Second, a negotiated reading is when the viewer understands the meaning of the text in a multi-faceted way- in part as the producer intended, and part as oppositional. The viewer could see John McCain in the same skit and think he is an average, funny guy, but he would not make a good President. Third, an oppositional or resistant reading is when the viewer understands the meaning of the text in the opposite way the producer intended. The viewer could see the same skit and think John McCain is an idiot, has no sense of humor and would make a terrible president, and therefore not vote for him. Due to the possibility for multiple meanings, it is possible that the "true message" the producer intended in a satirical piece may not be the meaning that audiences understand (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008; Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). Colletta humorously writes that viewers may find Stephen Colbert's brashness funny, but completely miss the object of his satirical attack, and that "television's goal is to entertain, and in comedy shows it is to make people laugh, but people cannot be counted on to laugh at the "right' thing" (2009, p. 864).

Another important aspect of cultural and reception studies is the idea that spectatorship is based in gender, sex, class and race, among others. Viewers bring their own experiences to the film/skit/clip and each decodes it in different ways (Allen, 1992). Michael Slater developed a

similar model in communication theory that focuses on the reciprocal relationships of media exposure and beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, stressing the need to account for the psychological, sociological and contextual baggage that each viewer brings to the meaning. The Slater approach also shows how previous beliefs and attitudes shape one's media experience, but also that the media experience shapes one's subsequent beliefs and attitudes, as well as future media experiences (Slater, 2007).

The effects of media on politics have been studied long before the invention of radio and television, but the methods and results of these studies are similar. Politicians have also studied humor and the media in order to hone their speaking skills and employ new tactics to elicit more votes. Politicians' appearances in the media influence listeners and viewers. However, the politicians' cannot be assured the listeners and viewers understood the message and intent of the humor.

Pre-1975 Political Comedy on Radio and Television

Saturday Night Live was not the first venue, or even television show, to poke fun at politics and the President. *SNL* can trace its origins far before 1975. Bob Hope is attributed for once saying that 'television is the box they buried vaudeville in,' and many of the early stars of radio, and later in television, made their start in vaudeville. Fred Allen, Sid Caesar, Max Liebman, and Bob Hope himself, among many others, honed their skills in vaudeville variety shows before using radio as their outlet for humor and satirical wit. Some of their humor was political in nature. Fred Allen became known for his political skits and topical humor. Allen's radio career paralleled the ongoing history of *SNL*. Allen hosted a radio show once a week and sometimes spent up to 80 hours that week preparing the show from scratch. He was also at odds

with the network and would crack jokes about the network officials, and they even censored many of his more “derogatory” jokes and skits. His most successful radio show was *The Fred Allen Show* (1939-48). A popular segment of that show, “Allen’s Alley” (1942-49), was also the birthplace of the character Senator Claghorn, to whom Allen played straight man in the political satire of the skit (Havig, 1990; Shapiro, 2004).

Around the turn of the 20th Century, some scholars and observers named the new trends of sharper, briefer and more hard-hitting jokes as “new humor.” These trends could be seen in vaudeville variety shows and silent movies- away from the previous, less visual, rambling dialectical jokes from the more literary past. The trend of “new humor” can be attributed to more migration to cities, urban pressure, and racial and gender tensions (Havig, 1990). This more biting, critical style of humor is still being used today- especially on *SNL*.

Earlier television comedy variety shows, like the 1950-54 NBC hit *Your Show of Shows* with Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca, paved the way for their modern day counterpart. Producer Max Liebman related in an interview that he used a stock company of comedians, singers and dancers, and that the producers, writers and comedians started out every week with “practically nothing” so each show was prepared and delivered in one week (Broughton, 1986, p. 10). Even though the format might look the similar to *SNL*, *Show of Shows* never really pushed the envelope with show censors. After one account of a fully clothed strip tease, they never “attempted anything that would raise the eyebrows of the censors. [They] weren’t really inclined in that way” (p. 14). Liebman would not only recruit comedians and future stars from vaudeville circles, he would even bring on other vaudeville acts such as juggling and dancing for portions of his shows and specials. *Your Show of Shows* was voted the second best TV show of all times by

the industry in the early 1980's (Broughton, 1986). It was well received by television executives, viewers and advertisers, but, or maybe because, it was not overtly political or controversial.

The early years in television were altogether not really controversial either. However, like the “new humor” at the turn of the 20th century, the social unrest, urban pressures, racial injustices, and women’s movement of the 1960’s started a trend in television humor. In 1967 a revolutionary comedy show hit the airwaves, and *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* started pushing the envelope immediately on what was acceptable on air. With recurring political jokes, guest appearances from politicians like Robert Kennedy and Senator George Murphy, and a “Pat Paulsen for President” special, *The Smothers Brothers* paved the way for *SNL*, *Weekend Update*, *Thursdays* and *The Presidential Bash* specials (*The Smothers Brothers*). *The Smothers Brothers* had ridden the wave of the 1960’s counterculture, generational, and anti-war movement onto the small screen, but CBS could not handle the subjects of religion, sex, drugs, politics and war appearing on the show. The show was extremely popular with youth, and therefore advertisers trying to reach younger audiences. Nielsen ranked the show as one of the top five shows for viewers under 35, college graduates, professional workers and high-income families, but the show fought with CBS censors for the entirety of its run, and was finally cancelled in 1969 (Bianculli, 2009). It did, however, break the traditional mold and allowed later shows like *Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In*, *All In the Family*, and of course *SNL*, to make it on television (Bianculli, 2009; Carr, 1992).

In the same way *SNL* was not the first to joke about the President, Gerald Ford was not the first President to have taped or appeared on a show that parodies politicians. Following *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, *Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In* started as a comedy special in 1967, but was so popular NBC picked it up for a regular series which ran from January 1968 -

May 1973 (Jenkins, 2010). The show featured a huge company of regulars who took turns shouting jokes at a frenetic pace out windows of the “joke wall,” short skits, musical numbers, special guests and bright flashy colors and graphics. *Laugh-In* was extremely popular, and the show’s recurring tag lines could be heard the next morning in offices and schools. Some of the more popular tag lines were “Here come de judge,” “You bet your sweet bippy,” and “Look that up in your Funk and Wagnalls.” By far, though, the most popular tagline, which came to represent the show, was “Sock it to me!” (Jenkins, 2010).

Richard Nixon famously appeared on *Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In* on September 16, 1968 to say the tagline “Sock it to me!” The difference between the overtly political *Smothers Brothers* and the “happening” comedy style of *Laugh-In* was best described by David Bianculli in his book *Dangerously Funny: The Uncensored History of the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*: “Where *Comedy Hour* used Nixon as a punch line, *Laugh-In* let Nixon deliver the punchline” (2009). *Laugh-In* creator George Schlatter said they invited Nixon’s opponent Hubert Humphrey to respond in a later episode “I’ll sock it to you, Dick!” but Humphrey declined. Schlatter also said that they were not aware how effective the tactic would be, but that “there were a lot of other factors in the election, too.” Humphrey went on to say that not appearing on *Laugh-In* “may have cost him the election” (Kolbert, April 19, 2004, p. 2). Nixon’s Vice President, Spiro T. Agnew, even appeared as a guest on *The Red Skelton Hour* in 1970 during a traveling campaign against “drug culture” (Ozersky, 2003). During the 1970 election, *Laugh-In* helped shape public perception about the political candidates, but it was not until a new show was created in 1975 for NBC that people began to realize the power of political satire on television in influencing public thought and behavior, and unlike *The Smothers Brothers*, *Saturday Night Live*, was allowed to remain on air for more than three seasons.

Shows such as *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* and *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* were part of the broadcast networks' attempts to capture a youthful audience. The shows and networks shied away from the previous traditional, "least-objectionable programming" philosophy and began to target demographics groups in the mid-1960s. Networks and advertisers were beginning to notice that the baby boomer generation was getting old enough to be spending a substantial amount of money in the economic marketplace and it became their strategy to target the 18-35 year-old demographic with "relevant" show such as *The Smothers Brothers*, *Laugh-In* and eventually *Saturday Night Live* (Ozersky, 2003). One of these more politically-charged shows, though it had a broader appeal, was *All In the Family*. *All In the Family* first aired in January 1971, and with it brought racial and ethnic issues into primetime. The main character, Archie Bunker, was created by producer Norman Lear to use humor as a vehicle to fight against bigotry and racial tensions. Critics argued that introducing these controversial, and sometimes heated and racist, issues in viewers' living rooms actually reinforced Archie Bunker's ignorance as a way of thinking, and re-introduced many racial and ethnic slurs and derogatory stereotypes to a new generation. The recurring themes in the show of Archie's bigotry and racism, and his son-in-law Mike's liberal idealism created plots with real issues, and not just situational comedy as in the traditional TV show models of the 1950s and early 1960s. Although it would later become the number one show for several years, the show was not an immediate commercial, or even critical, success. In May 1971 CBS decided to renew this mid-season replacement, and with it began the legacy of what some television historians call the most influential program in television history (Ozersky, 2003; Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). *All In the Family* and the networks' decisions to target a youthful, fragmented, counter-culture audience completely overhauled the primetime line up and broadcasting strategy of the day. This overhaul ultimately

led to the creation of *Saturday Night Live*, one of the longest-running live television shows in history, and to a change in the way comedy and television influence politics, politicians and viewers.

Saturday Night Live and Politics

A 2007 study by Bippus in the *International Journal of Humor Research* found that the motive, target of a politician's humor (self or opponent), and quality of humor are key predictors of the humor's effectiveness. She found that humor targeted against oneself is more effective than targeting an opponent. These attributes of a politician's humor are important for comedy and political success, and they can be viewed in the guest appearances of presidents and presidential candidates on *SNL* throughout the years. Most candidates who appeared on the show employed some self-disparaging humor to signal that they 'get' the jokes about them and make light of the situation.

Saturday Night Live began because Johnny Carson wanted to go on vacation. For years NBC had been running *The Best of Carson* on Saturday nights, but Carson wanted to save them to air on weeknights so he could take time off from shooting and go on vacation. In 1974, Carson demanded that this happen, so NBC executives had to develop a new show to air on Saturday nights in place of the reruns. Lorne Lipowitz (Michaels) was named executive producer for this new project based on his history with comedy shows, Lily Tomlin comedy specials and some comedy films. At this time, there was also an empty studio in 30 Rockefeller Center that had been built for Toscanini's NBC Orchestra, and in the 1950s it was remodeled for television. NBC executives decided to combine the needs of a replacement show for Carson and a purpose for dusty, neglected old Studio 8H. Lorne Michaels and his cohorts came up with the idea to do a

live variety show with influences in vaudeville, sketch comedy, burlesque, popular music, and youth counter-culture aimed at the 18-35 year-old demographic. The cast and writers, gathered mostly from urban comedy clubs, would write and rehearse all week and end with a live 90 minute show of topical and satirical humor on Saturday nights and begin again on Monday, in the same tradition as many vaudeville and radio and television variety shows. This would be the “television generation’s own television show” designed to be attractive to baby boomers (Shales & Miller, 2002, p. 4). NBC and Carson were skeptical of the show, and some of the executives at NBC criticized the target of the show because people of that demographic would not be at home to watch the show at midnight on Saturdays, but Michaels kept the project rolling forward. The name of the show was to be *Saturday Night*, in the same vein of the NBC shows *The Today Show*, *The Tonight Show*, *Tomorrow*, and *Later*, etc., but there was also an ABC show at the same time called *Saturday Night Live with Howard Cosell*. The ABC show aired at 8 p.m. during prime time and the cast members were called the “Prime Time Players.” Writer Herb Sargent dubbed the NBC show’s cast the “Not Ready for Primetime Players” because they were on late night, and had considerably more controversial and edgy humor (Shales & Miller, 2002; *Saturday Night Live Transcripts*).

Saturday Night finally had a producer, a studio, a name, a time slot, and a cast of young comedians from New York, Los Angeles and Canada. The first show went live on October 11, 1975 hosted by George Carlin. The first episode established the traditional format of the show with a guest host, a musical guest, commercial parodies, satirical humor and sketches, and a “fake news” segment called “Weekend Update.” Johnny Carson was “openly appalled” with the show and later continually turned down the show’s annual invitations to host. After 17 episodes, *Saturday Night Live with Howard Cosell* on ABC was cancelled. Michaels had wanted the name

Saturday Night Live since the beginning of the project to emphasize that it was a live variety show, so he called and asked if he could have the title. After 10 episodes, the NBC show became *Saturday Night Live* and took its place in television history (Shales & Miller, 2002; *Saturday Night Live Transcripts*).

Over the 35 years *Saturday Night Live* has been on the air, politicians have been recurring jokes on the show. The first presidential spoof was Chevy Chase impersonating, with not much effort, President Gerald Ford. Chase went on to do six skits portraying Ford as a bumbling klutz, and then, even during the first season, the show established its tradition of poignant political humor. For a revolutionary show in its first season, *SNL* attracted big name hosts, musical guests and high-profile cameos. It was in 1976 that Gerald Ford himself taped a short segment for the show. People are still following this precedent of appearing on the show after being parodied—especially politicians and presidential candidates.

In April 1975, Gerald Ford joked with Chevy Chase at the Radio and Television Correspondents Association Dinner. After emcee Bob Hope introduced Ford, he pretended to catch the tablecloth in his pants and pulled it off spilling silverware into Chase's lap. Then he "accidentally" tripped on the way to the podium sending his speech notes flying into the audience. When he pulled out his real speech notes, he began by saying, "I'm Gerald Ford and you're not!" as a nod to Chase's *SNL* "Weekend Update" segment (Fessier, December 27, 2006). This joke would be repeated on the show in early 1976. Eight years after Nixon appeared on *Laugh-In*, Gerald Ford appeared on only the 18th episode of *Saturday Night Live*. *SNL* writer Al Franken and producer Lorne Michaels had asked Ford's Press Secretary, Ron Nessen, to host the show, and with Ford's permission, Nessen agreed. To contribute to Nessen's hosting duties, Ford taped three sentences that were worked into the show. First, the cold open "Live from New York,

it's Saturday Night!" then the intro, "Ladies and Gentleman, the Press Secretary to the President of the United States," which was played twice during the course of the show. Probably the most memorable Ford segment was "I'm Gerald Ford, and you're not," a spoof on Chevy Chase's "Weekend Update" gag "I'm Chevy Chase and you're not" (Horner, 2009). The motives for Gerald Ford to appear on *Saturday Night Live* are pretty clear: to dispel the negative image of him as a klutz or bumbler by being associated with the show that makes fun of him. As Washington D.C. humorous speechwriter Landon Parver wrote in *The New Yorker*, "Really, that is the purpose of political humor— for a politician to be better liked" (Kolbert, April 19, 2004). President Ford appeared on the show that so exaggeratedly painted him as a bumbling goof that he seemed to be poking fun at himself for the same reasons. According to Parver, "if a politician can make fun of his faults he is, in effect, saying, 'I'm not really worried about it; you shouldn't be, either'" (Kolbert, April 19, 2004, p. 3).

President Ford's involvement with the show was very controversial- not because of what he did, but because of the other skits on the show. Just a few of the skits on that episode were John Belushi as a marijuana-smoking Army Lt. Colonel, jokes about the deceased Generalissimo Francisco Franco, "presidential erections," a commercial parody for "Flucker's Jam," men harmonizing and dancing while using urinals, a skit showing a young unmarried couple in bed with members of the Supreme Court stopping them when they performed illegal acts, and "Autumn Fizz"- a commercial parody of a carbonated douche (Horner, 2009; *Saturday Night Live Transcripts*). In his 2009 biography, it is clear that Nessen's motive for doing the show was to humanize Ford by including him in the jokes, not just making jokes about him. However, the media's reaction to Ford's involvement was almost completely negative. There were questions about the undertones of skits with which the President was associated, comments about how the

topics of the skits did not mix with the White House well, and comments of disgrace to the President. One aide even expressed concerns about the show's effect on the upcoming primaries (Horner, 2009). Shortly following Nessen's hosting, he was asked about the President's reaction to the show. Nessen related that the President and First Lady viewed portions of the show and that there was "basically no reaction." According to a *New York Times* article, Betty Ford said she and the President found some of the show's skits "a little distasteful," but they thought the "White House material was very funny- [they] both laughed at it and had a good time" ("Notes on people," April 22, 1976). It was the press's overall negative view of the show that may have been more important than the President's actual statements. Most Americans used, and still use, the media as a gatekeeper and opinion leader of political information. When a person reads reports such as "Mr. Ford should have been more careful and Mr. Nessen has done his boss a great disservice," and Nessen's performance evoked "a stony silence from the big critic in the Oval office" along with the other negative reviews of the performance and the President's involvement, one cannot help but be influenced to think the same (Horner, 2009, pp.16-17). Some tried to compare Ford's involvement with *SNL* to Nixon's with *Laugh-In*, but *SNL* biographer Tom Shales, at the time a *Washington Post* television critic, wrote that the "sketches and gags about sex, marijuana and politics are far more explicit and outrageous than the *Laugh-In* material ever was" (Shales, April 19, 1976; Horner, 2009, p. 15). During a phone call, Nixon's friend and *Laugh-In* writer Paul Keyes related that "ABC made it very positive, there was nothing negative in the whole thing" about Nixon's involvement in the show ("Nixon tapes: Laugh In," 2008). Gerald Ford did not have the same experience with television comedy. In Ford's autobiography *A Time to Heal* (1979) he shared his opinion about *SNL*'s and the press's caricature of him as a stumbler.

There was no doubt in my mind that I was the most athletic president to occupy the White House in years ... [but] from that moment on, every time I stumbled or bumped my head or fell in the snow, reporters zeroed in on that to the exclusion of almost everything else. ... [This] helped create the public perception of me as a stumbler. And that wasn't funny. (Ford, 1979, p. 289)

However, in a 1986 speech about humor and the presidency he said, "On occasion I winced. But on the other hand, Betty and I used to watch *Saturday Night Live* and enjoyed it. Presidents are sitting ducks, and you might as well sit back and enjoy it" (Horner, 2009).

Ford's involvement with *Saturday Night Live* was not deemed a successful political strategy, but it was a success for the show. Nessen and Ford marked the first political figures to appear on the show, which now is commonplace. The idea of such a major political figure appearing on a late night comedy show quickly changed the mindset of campaigning, as well as started a major theme for study and research. Can a comedy show influence voters? Horner makes an interesting argument- "Of those one million votes that separated Carter from Ford, how many of them might have been influenced by Ford's image as a bumbling dolt, controlled by Richard Nixon?" (Horner, 2009, p. 3). This idea recurs throughout political campaigns in the *SNL* era, and only a few other presidential candidates went to the source and appeared on the show. To this day, Ford remains the only sitting President to be involved with the show.

At the end of the 1979-1980 season, Lorne Michaels walked out of his job as producer and the majority of the cast and writing staff followed him. Former Associate Producer Jean Doumanian took the position and hired a completely new cast and staff. Due to her lack of experience with comedy, and what others would call lack of an eye for talent, her short reign as producer from November 1980 to March of 1981 is considered by critics to be the worst period for the show. The one success for the show during this time was new cast member Eddie Murphy, who would go on to be the most successful graduate of the *SNL* class. NBC executive

and co-creator Dick Ebersol acted as Producer from Doumanian's end in 1981 until Michaels eventually returned in 1985 (Shales & Miller, 2002; Hammill, 2010).

Ebersol had the job of salvaging the show and placating the cast and he was able to convince a few of the previous performers and writers to return to the show. During the period around the 1984 election *SNL* shied away from political humor, relying mostly on 'goofy' jokes about President Ronald Reagan. Cast member and writer Brad Hall recalled the reason for the lack of politics during this period was because, "the people at NBC didn't want that. The thing that originally made the show popular was really resisted" (Shales & Miller, 2002, p. 274). In fact, writer Harry Shearer left the show after all his Ronald Reagan skits were cut before or during rehearsals (p. 287). Some of this resistance could be attributed to the already declining viewership and failing numbers from the regime change. The show was still trying to gain back viewers, sponsors and popularity and could not afford to do too much politically biting material. Although Reagan never appeared on the show, it must be noted that his youngest son, Ron Reagan, hosted the show during his father's presidency. The February 18, 1986 show was comprised of many expected jokes and comments about Ron Reagan's role as the son of the President and the family's interesting dynamics. The political jokes poked fun at Ron Reagan's ideology being so different from his father's, and President Reagan's conservative ideals. Despite rumors at the time that Ron Reagan was gay, this topic was left out of the satire on the show. In one skit, Reagan was dancing around like Tom Cruise in *Risky Business* while costumed in a pink shirt, but the show was not too scandalous or controversial and not much press or audience response can be found.

During his Presidency, Bill Clinton inspired quite a bit of material for *Saturday Night Live*, and more specifically for impersonator Darrell Hammond. Clinton never hosted or

appeared on the show in real life, but he was given the opportunity. *People Magazine* reported during the week of May 3, 2004 that former President Bill Clinton was invited to host *SNL*. This was not the first rumor that the former President would host. President Clinton did have contact with the show, even though he did not accept the offer to host. In April 1997, Darrell Hammond performed as Clinton's clone to the President's face during an appearance at the Radio and Television Correspondent's Dinner. Hammond's colleague, Norm MacDonald, was also the guest speaker, and closed by performing his impersonation of Senator Bob Dole. (*Radio and Television*, 1997).

Former New York Mayor and Presidential hopeful Rudolph Giuliani has appeared on *Saturday Night Live* more times than any other politician. He first appeared on January 13, 1996 in a "Cold Open" sketch with New York Governor George Pataki, apologizing to the audience for the poor quality of the show. They claimed that the cast had been busy with the effort to assist in snow removal instead of rehearsing and then Giuliani and Pataki were in no other skits (*Saturday Night Live Transcripts*). This appearance was almost two years before Giuliani's bid for reelection, so it would not be considered a direct campaign strategy. However, any publicity, especially on national television, can be good strategy for a campaign if the comedy used was good quality and effective.

Giuliani's first time to host *SNL* was on November 22, 1997- only 18 days after his reelection for Mayor. The show included skits where he is accused of being Saddam Hussein's best friend, boxes Janet Reno, plays an aging mother in a dress, and plays a cab driver who hates Rudy Giuliani. Because he hosted the show after the election, it could not have been a campaign strategy to appear on the late night show, but he still had motives for hosting. He willingly wore

a dress to get a laugh and good-naturedly commented on how to make New York City a better place by promoting hitchhiking.

Giuliani's following appearance on *SNL* was a cameo during the *2000 Presidential Bash* on November 5, 2000, after dropping out of his senatorial campaign and after the height of his extramarital affair scandal. Other politicians appeared on the *Presidential Bash*- a special show that aired the night before Election Day 2000 comprised of both new and old political skits. Both Vice President Al Gore and Governor George W. Bush made appearances as themselves, as well as Jesse Jackson and Jesse Ventura, along with archival footage of George and Barbara Bush, Colin Powell, Hillary Clinton and Ted Kennedy (Michaels, 2000; "SNL Presidential Bash 2000").

Giuliani's next appearance on *SNL* was of a completely different nature. The Mayor made a cameo on the show on September 29, 2001 in the wake of the September 11th tragedy. He addressed the audience at the beginning of the show to honor the men and women who lost their lives and the firefighters and policemen who were instrumental during the attack and the aftermath. After Paul Simon sang "The Boxer," Lorne Michaels thanked Mayor Giuliani for encouraging them to go on with the season premiere of the show. Michaels asked him if they "could be funny" yet during the sad time. As a joke, and without missing a beat Giuliani replied, "Why start now?" (*Saturday Night Live Transcripts*).

Giuliani also appeared during the "Weekend Update" sketch on December 15, 2001 during his final weeks as Mayor and after his unsuccessful attempt at the open Senate seat. As cast members Tina Fey and Jimmy Fallon ask Giuliani if he has to leave, they all break into the song "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow" with Fey dressed as New York City and Fallon pretending to be Giuliani (*Saturday Night Live Transcripts*).

Rudy Giuliani's most recent appearance on *SNL* was on March 1, 2008 following his withdrawal from his campaign to become the Republican Party's presidential nominee. He again appeared on the "Weekend Update" sketch, but this time to endorse candidate John McCain for the nomination. When asked about his campaign strategy and any changes he would like to have made, Giuliani self-reflexively jokes he would not have appeared in drag on the show back in 1997 because "it was the dress that killed [him]" in the primaries (Michaels, 2008s). This self-referential joke about his previous appearance was not a serious reason for his poor performance, but shows that Giuliani was employing humor for mood improvement and to make light of his previous performance. Giuliani's strategy for appearing for this show was evident when he took the time to seriously endorse John McCain; he was working for his political party to promote the Republican front-runner for President.

Rudy Giuliani's legacy on *SNL* is marked with different motives and strategies for appearing, as well as the "lesson learned" not to wear a dress on television if you have hopes of running for President. His importance as the first sitting Mayor and first sitting politician to host or appear live on the show will, however, continue to impact the campaigns and episodes of the future.

During the 1996, and to a greater degree during the 2000 election season, *SNL* returned to its former glory and its "richest vein of humor, American Politics, and in the process the show rejuvenated itself for the umpty-umpth time" (Shales & Miller, 2002, p. 443). This was particularly prevalent during the 2000 debates between Al Gore and George W. Bush. This thesis discusses the relationship between *SNL* and American politics, and it is nowhere more present than during the 2000 election when it was reported by Al Gore's aides that Gore actually studied the show's debate parodies to see where he was going wrong (Shales & Miller).

Former Vice President Al Gore made a cameo appearance with George W. Bush during the *Presidential Bash 2000* to encourage viewers to vote the next day (*SNL Presidential Bash 2000*). Gore also hosted *Saturday Night Live* on December 14, 2002- two years after losing the 2000 election to George W. Bush. Although his political campaign had ended, his strategy for a possible 2004 election included *SNL*. The show included jokes and sketches about his extended kiss with his wife Tipper, being obsessed with the Presidential chair on the set of *West Wing*, and a “Daily Affirmation with Stuart Smalley” in which Gore repeats lines such as “I am...sad...about not being...President, and that’s ...okay,” “I don’t have to be the most powerful...man in the world,” and “All I have to do is be the best Al I can be because I’m good enough...I’m smart enough... and doggonit people like me.” The show was scattered with comments about Gore receiving the popular vote in the election and other expected comments about the race and Vice Presidential choices (*Saturday Night Live Transcripts*).

Al Gore appeared on the *SNL* again on May 13, 2006 in a cameo role. The skit portrayed Gore as the President of the United States in a parallel Earth where global warming had been solved, gasoline was too plentiful, healthcare was universal, Social Security and welfare had been “fixed,” the nation’s surplus was a “perilously low 11 trillion dollars” and natural disasters had been eradicated. This appearance occurred a year before Gore received the Nobel Peace Prize and an Academy Award for his contributions to educate about and combat global warming (*Saturday Night Live Transcripts*).

Holbert and Geidner (2009) suggest a need to apply the Slater approach to the *SNL* skits in which Tina Fey portrays Sarah Palin to understand media effects and the “continually reinforcing relationships between media use and the audience members’ political beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors over time” (pp. 352-353). As almost a foreshadowing request for this

study, they go on to write that political satirical messages, like in *SNL*, are extremely complex and audience members will react in many different ways, but “there is every indication that the *SNL* material highlighted for this example [Fey- Palin] would elicit some fairly strong emotional reactions and these emotional reactions can have an influence on a range of democratic outcomes that would be of interest...” (Holbert & Geidner, 2009, p. 35).

In order to test how televised comedy sketches influence viewers’ attitudes of political institutions and candidates, Rackaway, Smith and Anderson (2003) conducted a focus group which featured video clips of *SNL* skits from *SNL Presidential Bash 2000*, a recap show of political skits from the show’s then 25-year history. Interesting outcomes of the focus group were that group participants saw comedy political programming as an alternative to biased news media, many participants were resistant to the idea that their opinions could be changed, and every participant saw or inferred different meanings from the skits. One participant stated that the skit was “not going to change my opinion. It just makes me laugh.” However, another participant’s previous beliefs were challenged because one skit portraying Ronald Reagan “ruined my whole image of him,” as he/she had grown up perceiving him as one way, and the skit brought that into question. Several participants agreed that the skits were “effective in the fact it made [them] stop and think” (Rackaway, Smith & Anderson, 2003, p. 27). It is interesting and meaningful to note that different skits that used different methods of humor varied the amount of influence the skit had. The authors summarized that the study “leaves little doubt” that political satire, specifically from *Saturday Night Live* political skits, does affect dominant or preexistent beliefs and images of political figures and events (p. 28-29).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This thesis analyzes the content of the skits and examines the reported perceptions of a sample of online posters about *Saturday Night Live* political skits and appearances by candidates during the 2008 U.S. presidential election. The analysis focuses on Senators John McCain, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden and Governor Sarah Palin because of their positions as their parties' nominees, and in Clinton's case, her position as one of the last two nominee hopefuls for the Democratic Party. Democratic Vice Presidential nominee Senator Joe Biden never appeared in person on the show and, therefore, is only included in this study in the Chapter 5, which discusses viewers' online comments about *SNL*'s Jason Sudekis portraying Biden. There were several other candidate hopefuls that were spoofed on *SNL* as they ran for their parties' nominations, and some, like Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Governor Mike Huckabee, actually appeared on the show's skit "Weekend Update." However, for the purpose of studying the audiences' reactions to the candidates and the influence of *SNL*, these candidate hopefuls and their skits and/or appearances on the show are not included.

The analysis is of comments posted on nbc.com, and discusses if and how the *SNL* skits and appearances influenced viewers and voters perceptions of the candidates. Only the comments posted on the official NBC website are used because it runs the official *SNL* website and posts the original, accurate skit videos in full, while other sites might have edited, added or deleted parts of the video, in turn making viewers' comments incomparable to those from the full-length version. However, in the case of Hillary Clinton's sole appearance, there are only 2 comments posted about the skit. There are too few to come to any conclusions or use for comparison to other candidates, so accordingly viewer comments accessed from other sites and

blogs on the Internet are used for her actual appearance only. The comments are analyzed for content in order to informally categorize them for the means of comparison. All comments are read and categorized into 5 groups by the researcher/writer:

- 1- Comment suggests skit reinforced preconceived ideology
- 2- Comment suggests skit changed, impacted or influenced preconceived ideology
- 3- Comments about entertainment and/or humor value
- 4- Comments indicating that *SNL* is just for comedy and should not be used for political debate or influence
- 5- Irrelevant or miscellaneous comments

The first category is for comments like “John McCain is the best candidate for the job” posted on a video of John McCain’s appearance or even on one of his competitors’ videos because there is nothing in the comment to suggest the poster changed his/her mind to make this statement. The second category is for comments such as “After watching this video I think I’m going to vote for Obama because Palin is dumb!” because the comment indicated the poster had formed a new opinion. The third category is for the majority of the comments, such as “That was HILARIOUS!” or “Amy Poehler is sooo funny!” The final category is mostly to separate any comments unusable for this study because some people just like to post nonsense on message boards because they can. These comments include anything about subjects other than *SNL* or the presidential race in general, and links to secondary sites that appear multiple times (spam). During the analysis, the need for the fifth category arose. Many times a poster would comment in response to the videos and the other posters’ comments about politics. These posters would claim that the *SNL* videos are meant for humor and the other viewers/ poster should not debate the politics or influence of the show. Since these comments do not really fit in any of the other

categories because they are not formulating any opinion supporting or negating the *SNL* clip, and the comment goes further than simply stating the skit's comedic value, a separate category was created. Not all messages are used for content analysis, and as in Russell and Puto's study on television audience measures, the technique of purposive sampling allows the researcher to "focus more particularly on Internet comments that seemed most relevant to the study," and are "selected for their content and relation to the study objectives" (Russell & Puto, 1999, p. 395). Because of this research method, the categorizing of comments is more of an informal organizational tool to find the most relevant comments for the study.

These comments are used to examine if and how the *SNL* videos accessed online and the candidates' appearances on the show influenced viewers' perceptions of the presidential candidates of the 2008 election as evidenced by their own comments. The motives for, the target of the humor, and the perceived effectiveness of the humor in the skits and by the candidate are postulated based on the study parameters used by Bippus (2007).

This study is limited because the only comments and responses that are studied are from people who use the Internet, viewed the sketches, liked or disliked the show enough to post, or posted for some other unknown reason. If the viewer's age, sex, political leanings and/or reason for posting is not known, it is difficult to analyze, compare or make generalizations about the comments. Since all these demographics are not known for each viewer, it is helpful to know the general demographics for *SNL* viewership and Internet video viewership.

SNL was created for the 18-35 demographic and still emphasizes its youthfulness and trend-setting abilities (Shales & Miller, 2002; Hammill, 2010). An estimated 61% of all adult Internet users, 65% of men, and 57% of women watch video online. A majority (78%) of 18-29 year-olds watch video online, compared to 66% of 30-49 year-olds, and only a reported 45% of

people over 50 (Purcell, 2010). While 50% of adult Internet users report they have watched a comedy video online, 93% of 18-29 year-olds watched a comedy video, with 74% of 30-49 year-olds and 52% of Internet users over age 50 state they have. Even though *SNL* is a television show, the individual skit clips are posted and watched at a much higher frequency than full episodes. Therefore, they are treated as comedy videos instead of watching television shows on the Internet for this study. Older online video watchers are more likely to view news and educational videos, but all age groups watch political video almost equally (between 37-46%). However, many of the commenters identified themselves as over the age of 50, or “*SNL* fans since the beginning.” People with at least some college experience are much more likely to watch video online than those with just a High School diploma or less, and there is a positive correlation between household income and percentage of online video watching. Non-white Internet users are more likely to watch entertainment content (comedy, TV shows, movies, cartoons) than news, educational or political videos (Purcell, 2010). There were hundreds of online video comments simply debating the politics of the election and campaigns in which race was discussed and identified by many of the posters. From observation of all the comments posted on all videos pertaining to the 2008 election, there is a relatively representative field of comments from men, women, whites, non-whites, the young and the old. To be as accurate as possible in analyzing the political ramifications of these videos, only comments posted before November 4, 2008, Election Day, are be used. After studying the viewers’ comments, possible uses of the videos by these viewers, and the ways *SNL* might have influenced their perceptions of the candidates will be discussed.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF ONLINE COMMENTS REGARDING CANDIDATES' APPEARANCES

This chapter breaks down all appearances by the major candidates of the 2008 Election. Each candidate, McCain, Palin, Obama and Clinton, has a subsection in which all appearances are briefly summarized and then discussed using Internet posts from video viewers from the website. Although John McCain and Sarah Palin appeared more frequently than the other candidates, all appearances of the four candidates are discussed to study the possible effects of the appearances, regardless of parity between the numbers of times on the show. Possible motives for the appearances and jokes are discussed, as well as the target of, and perceived effectiveness of the humor. The comments are then coded, as set out in the methodology for organizational purposes only, and then analyzed to discuss the possible meanings and readings of the skits and viewers' comments. The motives, targets, and comments are also used to discuss possible influence of the skits to the viewers' perceptions and possibly even votes.

The five major candidates during the 2008 Presidential Election were spoofed multiple times on *SNL*, but four of them went even further in their relationship with the comedy show. Barack Obama was the first of these candidates to make an appearance on the show in 2007 while he was still seeking the Democratic nomination, although his first and only appearance on the show is usually overlooked because he appeared so early in the campaign. Hillary Clinton appeared four months after Obama in an 'Editorial Response' skit after her second debate with Obama. John McCain was third of these candidates, but the first to appear as his party's official presidential nominee. He made a total of three appearances for a total of five skits on *SNL*. As the last candidate to be named, Sarah Palin was the last to be on the show, but she appeared as

herself twice in a total of three skits before Election Day. The appearances and comments will be organized in order of the most appearances and proximity to Election Day.

John McCain- 5/17/08, 11/1/08, 11/3/08

Senator John McCain first appeared on *SNL* when he hosted the show on October 19, 2002, and was the first sitting Senator to host the show (Wikipedia, 2011). He did not appear again, however, until after he was the Republican nominee for President. His first appearance as a candidate was on May 17, 2008 when he acted in two segments: “Weekend Update” and a mock campaign commercial. During the “Weekend Update” skit, McCain told Democrats to “take [their] time” and not to “pick a candidate too soon,” and he jokingly told WU anchors Seth Meyers and Amy Poehler to “fight amongst yourselves” referring to the Democratic Party’s continued race between Clinton and Obama for the nomination (Michaels, 2008u). After the introduction of McCain and throughout his speech he displayed a smile, showed good comedic timing and received overwhelming laughter and applause. The live studio audience seemed to enjoy the cameo, and so did the Internet video audience. Online viewers commented on relatively general aspects of the skit and McCain. One female viewer, wildwood, said she “Loved it Loved it, WE NEED YOU... dont give up, I am truly [*sic*] scared if you do not become our President.” Male commenter boostah, possibly tired of political debates on other video message boards wrote, “It’s a comedy skit. Try laughing at it. That’s why they do it,” and “That skit was Hilarious!” (Michaels, 2008u). These comments are not very telling about the influences of the video on viewers, but the pattern of McCain’s appearances and the audiences’ reaction to him is interesting to note.

During the mock campaign message McCain states that what America needs in their next President is “certainly someone who is very, very, very old,” and that he has the “courage, the wisdom, the experience and, most importantly, the oldness necessary” (Michaels, 2008h). This skit was much more self-deprecating than the previous one in this episode. As Bippus (2007) found, however this could be to his advantage because audiences respond better to self-deprecating humor. Male poster spargel wrote that “he’s a terrible comedian... and a terrible speaker,” and called him an “old fart.” In response, poster Country_First was angry and wrote that she is a McCain supporter so he (spargel) should “laugh at the skit and just shut the hell up.” Another female, Duhaman_amanduh, who seemed to not be influenced by the political message of the skit told the quarrelers to “chill out, it was funny,” presumably in order to make light of the situation. The female viewers’ comments on this video seem to be more affected by the humor of the skit and are not concerned with the political messages or impact McCain’s appearance might have had on them. One was already a McCain supporter, and the other did not seem to be influenced one way or the other. One other female viewer called republican10 wrote that she thought it was “smart, and extremely funny, for both McCain and Palin to make an appearance bc [sic] it shows they watch the show, they have a sense of humor, and are ok with it all.” She commented on this video months after it originally aired because of her mention of Palin’s appearances which had not yet happened, but this does not diminish the influence McCain’s skit had on her view of him as “smart” and “funny,” although, given her screen name she most likely felt that way before McCain appeared on *SNL*. The other few comments that were made about this skit did not really concern the influence of McCain’s appearance on viewers, as they focused more on name-calling and political arguments.

These first two skits during his first cameo appearance on *SNL* as a candidate do not show much influence on viewers' political beliefs or perceptions of McCain. However, these skits were written and performed in May 2008, months before McCain chose Palin as his running mate. The controversy surrounding his choice and the path of his campaign following that decision caused more publicity and criticism for the campaign, and ultimately, his next appearance on *SNL* on the last traditional episode before Election Day. The number of views on his next skit alone is over 1,000,000 and counting. This is indicative of the publicity and controversy surrounding his repeat appearance on the show. This episode was over five months after his previous performance, after his announcement of and campaigning with his running mate, and after Sarah Palin herself appeared on *SNL*. The higher views could also be, in part, attributed to Tina Fey's reprise of her role as Sarah Palin that consistently received the most publicity. The opening skit for the show featured John McCain and Sarah Palin (Fey) on the home shopping channel QVC to address the public because they could not afford the major networks like Obama could. As he addressed the viewers he also pitched items for sale such as blank plates to commemorate the town hall debates between McCain and Obama in which Obama declined to participate, "McCain Fine Gold" in reference to the McCain-Feingold Act (also called the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act), and a complete set of pork knives to "cut the pork out," a nod to his claim that he has in the past and would in the future cut unnecessary spending in the government. The majority of the six-minute sketch was composed of general humor about politics directed at both sides of the campaign, but he again used some self-deprecating humor when he called himself a "true maverick" because he is a "Republican without money" who can "only afford QVC." His comment on Obama's unwillingness to participate in the town hall debates was not written or delivered in an attacking way, so his

motive for the humor was probably perceived as being to gain common ground and not malice. This light-hearted fun was noted by viewers and most responded well to the skit and some even commented that it changed their minds about their votes; although many had an issue with the fact his appearance might have helped his campaign (Michaels, 2008t).

Commenter HPutt appreciated the humor, while still criticizing McCain's campaign when he gave "Kudos to Sen McCain for exposing his lighter side, as he did at the Catholic Charities dinner. A better man shown at these events than as he spoke, advertised, and managed his campaign." LA Filmmaker wrote that, "A sense of humor indicates a higher level of intelligence, McCain obviously has both...and humility." Besides only gaining laughter, this sketch did have at least some influence on viewers because Nacho66 wrote that, "Even though [he's] voting for Obama, [he] must say that McCain's appearance here helped remind [him] why [he] liked him 8 years ago," and AfromLA wrote that he "finally decided to jump ship and back McCain instead, and one of the reasons was this sketch. Partly because McCain is likable after all, and this shows it. But more because [he] forgot Obama refused all those debates with McCain (which was mentioned in the sketch) and that makes [him] think Obama is hiding too much. So, YEAH, this helped McCain even a little bit" (Michaels, 2008i). In an online exclusive *SNL* Backstage video showing bonus footage of this skit from backstage poster EVANCE wrote that he was "switching to McCain thanks to SNL!!!" Another viewer wrote that this episode "solidifie[d his] decision to vote for him [McCain]" (Michaels, 2008m).

As many viewers changed their minds about McCain, there were plenty who criticized his appearance and the idea that the skit had an influence. Snlfan2008 commented that he admires the show's work, but disagrees with McCain being on the show because he did not "run an honorable campaign," and it made him "puke in [his] mouth a little to think that this might be

helping him [McCain] at all.” Viewer Giacobrazzi wrote that he was upset that “McCain is using SNL to gain favor and in a joking way, make his same political points. SNL should stick to the actors acting and not get this close to reality.” According to humuhumu “Saturday Night Live is blowing it,” and he thought the appearances were “last second desperate moves by McCain to connect with young voters.” Obviously some viewers interpreted McCain’s motives for the appearances and the humor in an oppositional way and were not influenced by his appearance on the show. Goldengirl1 commented that it seemed like McCain had already given up or that he was “suffering from dementia and [didn’t] remember that the election [was] only 3 DAYS AWAY! This skit did absolutely nothing to help him, and in fact, seems more like a post-election loser skit.” RezMutt stayed in the middle by commenting that she found the election skits “funny and interesting,” but that she doubted “these skits have swayed votes.”

An interesting string of comments on the QVC video actually compared McCain’s performance to Obama’s and noted Obama’s singular appearance. Poster cappalangel wrote that she was surprised to see the “Senator to be so at ease, especially knowing that most of the actors he was working with probably aren't supporting him.” She also comments that “Since Obama canceled his appearance early on in the season, it was great to see that McCain kept his commitment,” and that “this might just be symbolic of the truth of things to come!” McCain’s appearance did affect her because he did something Obama did not and another viewer, MBrennan, also noted that “At least John McCain and Sarah Palin are able to laugh at themselves for showing up on SNL. Obama would never do that.” However, there were dissenters in this string as well because woguy33 wrote that he was “pretty sure the reason that Barak [*sic*] Obama didn't appear on SNL during the campaign was because he didn't need to do anything that desperate. Why make a fool of yourself hoping to get votes if you are already in the

lead? McCain and Palin have had a really bad campaign, they need this type of easy exposure.” Even a perceived positive over Obama, such as keeping a commitment and being at ease, was turned into a negative for him because it was suggested that he needed to appear on the show more than Obama did.

McCain’s second skit on November 1st was another “Weekend Update” cameo in which he discussed new last minute campaign strategies he was contemplating including the “double maverick,” the “reverse maverick,” and the “sad grandpa” strategies. When Seth Meyers introduced McCain most of the audience cheered, but this time there were also several people ‘booing’ him. McCain smiled, acknowledged the cheerers and dissenters with his facial expressions, and then went on to deliver his speech. All but one of McCain’s skits were monologues, and of those, this received the most comments (over 100) on the NBC website. Through observation of these videos, it seems that the more controversial the subject of the skit or the appearance was, the more views and comments the video received. Viewers received the message quite differently and many had an issue with his appearance so close to Election Day. The video did, in fact, influence both McCain and Obama supporters. Viewer ariachild wrote that she “liked McCain a little more for it. And it made [her] think.” Brax4Obama commented that he was “still voting for Obama, but it made [him] want to like the guy.” BillfromCA stated that “McCain actually has a great sense of humor. It would be great to have a man like that as our President.”

The video also had a negative influence, and many viewers thought that McCain should not have come on the show. Viewer Randolph appealed directly to McCain- “John, what have they made you do?? Sureley a stateseman [*sic*] like you doesn’t have to degrade himself like this?” He went on to call McCain’s appearance desperate and mentions that he “was going to

vote for this guy, but now he's a laughing stock." NoJoke questioned McCain's motives for going on the show writing that he is "desperate" and "willing to anything [*sic*] to try to get ahead." He conceded that McCain was funny, but that the skit did not help because "this country does not need another joke, it needs somebody who represents the simple folk." Some viewers felt that this appearance looked more like a concession appearance after losing the race. Goldengilr1 wrote that "Judging from this skit, I think he is resigned to losing the election," and kierker called him "pathetic." He also claims that McCain has been "reduced to a joke" and that "it was a bad idea for him to be on just a few days before the election, a last ditch effort to save a campaign that went to the gutter for no good reason" (Michaels, 2008v). Whether it was negative or positive, there were many reactions to McCain's appearance on the show furthering the idea that *SNL* appearances did change audience perceptions of the candidates.

John McCain's final appearance was on the *Saturday Night Live Presidential Bash 2008*, a two-hour prime-time special that aired on November 3, 2008– the night before Election Day (Toff, November 5, 2008). Some segments of the show were pre-recorded and some segments were performed live, with clips from past election sketches interspersed. McCain appeared alone in the first scene as he introduced the show, jokingly hinted about the other interesting shows that were on the other channels at that time, pointed out that the Bash was an "independent, unaffiliated show," and opened with the standard "Live from New York- It's Saturday Night!" McCain made a few tax plan jokes and called one of NBC's executives "Joe the Network Programmer"— a joke that he 'got' the fact he over-emphasized a man called "Joe the Plumber" during his campaign. Again, he was confident and smiling even though he stumbled on a few words. He received laughter throughout his monologue, even during parts that fell flat (Michaels, 2008o). Online viewer janetesque's perception of John McCain was improved, and she was

actually surprised no one had commented on the video saying, “It is actually funny. I realize that this stuff is written by the SNL writers for the candidates, but still...McCain comes across funny and very likable. I've never been that fond of him, but he does seem like a pretty likable guy when I see him doing these skits.” Viewer Nadia thanked Senator McCain “for bringing a good laugh to us,” and wished him “all the best.”

John McCain’s multiple appearances on *SNL* were ‘read’ in an array of ways by viewers and the pattern of these responses is interesting to note. His first appearance and skits in May 2008 were mostly regarded as being funny, interesting, and a good idea for the candidate. These online videos were not very controversial because they were McCain’s first cameos on the show, and accordingly there were not as many views and/or comments. His second appearance only three nights before the election was more controversial, and many viewers criticized these skits as being “desperate” and “pathetic.” These videos had the most views and comments, probably due to their timing at the height of his campaign and proximity to Election Day. By the time the *Presidential Bash* aired, people were used to seeing McCain on *SNL* and it was not a big deal. There were mixed reviews for this appearance, but overall it seemed to not be as big of a deal as the previous appearances. McCain’s appearances on *SNL* did influence viewers’ perceptions ideas and even some votes according to the viewers’ own comments.

Sarah Palin- 10/18/08, 11/3/08

John McCain announced Governor Sarah Palin as his running mate August 29, 2008- six days after Obama made his announcement of Joe Biden (“McCain taps Alaska,” 2008; “Obama introduces Biden,” 2008). Following the announcement it was a media whirlwind with Sarah Palin all over television and people praising, criticizing and questioning her and McCain’s

decision to choose her. Praises and criticisms of Palin ran the gamut of “courageous” and “funny” to “scary” and “moron.” The criticisms also brought questions of sexism to the campaign. Did McCain choose her just because she is a woman? Are the other candidates the better choice because they are men? If Palin wins how will she take care of her family and her special needs child?

When Geraldine Ferraro was nominated as Walter Mondale’s VP choice in 1984 some women felt intimidated by a female running for such a high position and 56% of women voted for Reagan in that election, despite the enormous crowds during the campaign that came to see Ferraro. One of McCain’s presumed strategies in the 2008 election was to convert some of Hillary Clinton’s supporters into McCain supporters by choosing a woman. He has been criticized for his choice, and similar to Ferraro in 1984, Palin has been asked questions like if she can handle deals with the Russians because she is a woman, and if she is still going to cook for her family if she wins. Ferraro was introduced at the Democratic National Convention by Tom Brokaw as “the first woman to be nominated for vice president ... Size 6!” Palin has been praised for her stylish glasses and hair highlights, as well as publicized as a former beauty queen who can “field dress a moose” (Baird et al, 2008). With hindsight, however, it can be said that the McCain/Palin campaign had about as much success as the Mondale/Ferraro ticket, losing to their opposition. What has changed in 24 years? Some female supporters flocked to Palin this time, but she still had female critics saying she shouldn’t run because of her parental duties to her special needs child. She was criticized for not being smart enough or experienced enough, but she also has a following of supporters who want her to run for President in 2012. She also went against the notion that female candidates are less likely to run negative attack campaigns (Herrnson & Lucaso). Although her sex and gender were discussed as major factors in her

nomination and campaign, surprisingly, they were not the focus of her appearances on *SNL* and viewers' comments.

Sarah Palin's first appearance on *SNL* consisted of 2 minutes, 15 seconds and 8 lines that she shared backstage with Lorne Michaels and Alec Baldwin while Tina Fey portrayed her at a mock press conference. Baldwin thought Palin was actually Fey in costume and proceeded to tell Michaels that Fey should not go out there with "that horrible woman" and called Palin a "Caribou Barbie" who "goes against everything we stand for." Michaels then properly introduced Baldwin to Gov. Palin and then Baldwin told her she is "way hotter in person," and that he "can't believe they let her [Fey], you know, play you [Palin]" with definitely a sexual undertone commenting on both women's bodies. Baldwin then went on stage to whisper into Fey's ear that the real Palin was about to come out to the "press conference." Fey was visibly shocked and then yelled "Bye" as she briskly walked offstage, sharing the screen with Palin for less than one second. Palin poked fun at her history of not answering reporters' questions and then opened with the traditional, "Live From New York, it's Saturday Night!" (Gov. Palin Cold Open).

Outside of the show both Baldwin and Fey have spoken out against Palin, Fey saying she "wants to be done playing this lady November 5th" ("Tina Fey's backstage interview," 2008). *SNL* is also perceived by most viewers to be a liberally biased show, so it follows that viewers questioned Palin's motives for appearing on the show. Viewer soapbxn wrote that "Governor Palin is a good sport" for appearing on the show and that "SNL did a nice job and fit her in tastefully." ChangeURmind thought it was "too cool that she can poke fun at herself!!!!" and IdeasAsOpiates, who makes a point to claim that he is not a fan of Palin, thought it "was a good decision" for her to appear and show that she "gets the joke." Another viewer, JohnCarlos,

who adamantly states he is “*NOT* supporting the McCain/Palin ticket [...] enjoyed her display of good sportsmanship by appearing on this show after she was torn apart” three or four times, and viewer CL2 admired her for “going into the lion’s den.” There were equally as many, if not more, people posting on message boards criticizing and questioning Governor Palin. Palin’s motives were questioned by BoooPalinsScary who asked, “So how much money was contributed to the McCain/Palin campaign? How much money did she sell herself for?” and then in response to soapbxn’s comment he went on to comment that he didn’t “think she’s a good sport. [He] thinks she’s a sellout. She’s no longer getting my vote.” IdeasAsOpiates also theorized her motives by commenting that she should have appeared the week after Fey’s first skit because by the time she appeared it was “old news” and that it was “not a game changer (nor was it meant to be.) It was simply trying to defuse the negative publicity she has been getting.” Poster papabotts criticized her lack of involvement in the skit writing “Sure, she was technically a good sport, (although her role was as limited as her press conferences are), but this was obviously a move to soften her image up a little bit. If [*sic*] there was nothing in it for her,” he wonders “if she would be there, [...] Most politicos who come on are at least willing to be challenged a bit and take actual part, even if only on weekend update.” Although some viewers like tarredon thought the appearance was “politically savvy,” others criticized *SNL* for her appearance and how they handled her skits. Viewer spence08 couldn’t “believe how *SNL* politically murdered Sarah Palin. Its [*sic*] sick, disgusting and unprofessional,” and CL2 thought the skit was “rude and crude and incredibly disrespectful.” Other viewers thought *SNL* should have gone further in their impersonation and script writing. Mal5233 thought “*SNL* was too kind,” and goes on to call Palin a “beauty queen and media diva.” This comment and Alec Baldwin’s body comparisons were two of only a few comments that addressed Palin’s sex and/or gender in her appearance.

Just as with responses to John McCain's appearances, some viewers were influenced by *SNL*. Viewer jeanrex wrote that the skits gave her the impression that the campaign again did not let her participate fully," comparing her performance and interviews to things she did before she was selected as McCain's running mate. Presumably in response to soapbxn's comment that Palin "is no longer getting [his] vote," other posters attacked the notion that the show has or should have any influence. Viewer justanyone wrote that she "seriously doubt[s] the show sways anyone," and that the show "is just a reflection of what most people are thinking." Commenter wiigfan seemed upset by the idea of *SNL* effecting political ideologies posting that "Regardless of your political views, allowing an SNL skit to determine which way you vote is just sad" (Michaels, 2008o). These comments seem to refute the idea that the show does influence viewers, but according to their comments, a few viewers were swayed one way or the other, so Palin's appearance on *SNL* did influence viewers' perceptions of her.

The second skit in which Palin participated during her first appearance was a cameo on "Weekend Update." After Seth Meyers introduced Palin, she told him that she had been "thinkin' it over and [she was] not going to do the piece [they] rehearsed." Meyers then asked co-host Amy Poehler if she remembered Palin's part and Poehler immediately began a rap about Palin and the stereotypes and "misconceptions" voters might have had about her such as her Alaskan culture, how some voters are "hot for" her, shooting moose and wolves, and her ability to see Russia from her front porch. While Poehler rapped, Palin had her hands up in the air, nodded and danced to the beat. The rap ended with Poehler pantomiming shooting a gun at a costumed moose character in the studio, and then Palin and Meyers agreed she "made the right decision" to not do the skit. After the rap was over Meyers ended the skit and Palin 'signed off' with Tina

Fey's trademark of saying, "Have a good night and a pleasant tomorrow." This skit had more 10,000 comments on nbc.com (Michaels, 2008t).

Most viewers 'read' the text/skit and commented in line with the political party with which they identify; however the skit did cause some viewers to think about it. Palin and McCain supporters were the minority of people who posted comments on videos on the NBC website, but it was not hard to find their comments. Viewer hsbrightest wrote that "Gov. Palin was such a good sport," and apparently believed that Palin really was going to participate and stated "She was right about deciding not to do the rap!" HelpUsPlz called Palin "absolutely FEARLESS," and bryenjarret "LOVED IT!!! Mainly b/c Sarah Palin...What a woman...amazing." These viewers have both dominant and oppositional readers because they see what the candidate and the campaign have strategized to show them (a brave, funny Palin), but they also oppositionally read the skit's satire directed toward Palin making fun of her. Viewer saddlestring commented on the lack of awareness on the part of Palin and her supporters writing "Wow...right under her nose they nailed her. Good for SNL. She just didn't get it...she seemed to think it was complimentary." Poster tukar commented that, "They weren't laughing with her, they were laughing AT her," and AZsunpower thought it was "funny too how Sarah Palin look[ed] very proud while they were totally making fun of her," questioning if she was just being a "Good Sport" or if "maybe she just [didn't] get it."

Some viewers criticized Palin, not for her politics, but because of her lack of involvement in the skits and show. ReallyRotten7 wanted to know why Gov. Palin went "on this show if she wasn't going to do anything except let everyone around her try to be funny/uncomfortable at the same time," and went on to write that this skit "was one of the most awful things [he had] ever seen," and questions why Palin would "embarrass herself like this? They didn't even give her one

funny line to read in either of her sketches and she agreed to do this? She looked terrible!!”

Poster tunker called Palin’s appearance merely “a publicity stunt to try to reclaim some voters and dignity.” Despite the decidedly pro and anti-Palin messages that were posted, quite a few viewers commented that the skit did influence them or cause them to think about Palin in a different way, effectively influencing their beliefs about her. Viewer cmceneany, who claimed to be an Obama supporter from California, stated that she was still going to “vote for Obama, but Palin did really well for fun and comedy,” and she went on to write that she knows “McCain will gain votes based on Palin on SNL!” Viewer sparky2008 wrote that she didn’t think Palin or McCain were “right for this country but [he] really [has] new respect for the Governor to come on and do that.” Although she was still going to vote for Obama, Sweets89 complimented Palin for going “into a hostile camp and [keeping] her good humor.” She also thought the skit “Probably won over some detractors,” and commented that Palin’s appearance in the skit “did make [her] like [Palin] tonight.” Another viewer, Lady Zarak, claimed to not agree with Palin, but wrote that she “gained respect for Palin for coming on this pro-liberal show and accepting the slight mocking in a relatively relaxed manner.” One interesting side note: many viewers found Fey’s impersonation of Palin so accurate that viewer Catatau54 wrote “Stupid question.... was that Sarah Palin or Tina Fey?” regarding Palin’s actual appearance.

Palin’s final appearance on the show was during the *SNL Presidential Bash 2008* which received the most controversy from posters, although millions fewer viewers than her previous two skits. The monologue skit that she performed was a transition between other live skits and clips from past election skits. Palin addressed the audience directly saying that she had been “a little annoyed” that *SNL* had run skits impersonating her, but that she was “glad to hear the show was still on the air.” The majority of the jokes poked fun at NBC and *SNL* for not having many

viewers or publicity, and jokes about revoking NBC's broadcast license in the future if they continue to make fun of her. Most of the jokes fell flat with only minimal laughter or applause, and one of the "jokes" that received some laughs was when Palin stated that on January 20th, she would be "sworn in as Vice President of the United States." Over the entire skit, only five remarks evoked any laughter at all (Michaels, 2008l).

Most viewers agreed with LisaGator who wrote that the skit "was very weird and creepy," and that "She isn't funny. At all." Viewer tunker commented that it was "kinda sinister" with "hardly any audience laughs." He attributed this to the audience "feverishly thinking something along the lines of 'tomorrow can't come soon enough so I can vote and shut that down.'" Even Palin supporter gregc6 admitted that he didn't "think she needed to do this little skit." Some viewers attributed some of the problems with the skit to her gender and style of address. Poster musician86 thought she came across like "America's mommy or something," and Txsgirl wrote that if Palin "didn't want to do SNL, she should have said so instead of coming across as a bitter B—ch." Quite a few of the viewers questioned *SNL*'s involvement and Seth Meyers' writing in this skit as well. Poster cbb42 wrote to Meyers that "it wasn't a bit entertaining or even a bit interesting," and he wants his "2 minutes back." Palin detractor meganmeat brought up the idea that maybe *SNL* could have given Palin "such a crappy script cause [*sic*] no on [*sic*] there likes her." Some viewers compared this performance to her first appearance and commented that the only reason the first two skits were funny was because other comedians surrounded her. One of these viewers, jrubic, stated that "her flat delivery and bitchy jokes [were] too close to what we would expect to be reality," and questioned what "gave her the hubris to think she could handle this on her own?" From observation, a negative comment like this would usually come from an anti-Palin male viewer, but in this case jrubic

identifies herself as female. Male poster kpmays called her “an absolute moron” and “completely unfunny!” Like many viewers on many different boards, he went on to write that “Tina Fey does Sarah Palin more justice than Sarah Palin does herself.” To counter these comments, male poster killroy134 again pointed out that “she is following a script,” and that “she was a good sport. Too bad they didn’t give her a decent line.” Not all viewers found the skit unfunny, though.

BryanNC08 stated that he loved Sarah Palin and thought that “those jokes were so funny and so true.” The following two quotes sum up viewers’ negotiated reception of Sarah Palin’s appearances on *SNL*:

“This has to be the least funny snl moment ever.” Jenny_708

“This is the funniest snl vidio [*sic*] ever!” Oregon_Voter

Hillary Clinton- 3/1/08

Hillary Clinton was the second of the 2008 Presidential candidates to appear on *SNL* during the course of the race. Sexism was an underlying factor in her campaign from the onset. One of her fundraisers, former Democratic Vice Presidential nominee Geraldine Ferraro wrote in the *Boston Globe* in March that “sexism” contributed to Hillary’s defeat and that she wanted a study to determine “whether either the Clinton or Obama campaign engaged in sexism and racism” (Abcarian, March 13, 2008). Editor of the *Weekly Standard*, Noemie Emery summarized the Party’s position in an editorial, writing that, “the party is so sexist that it’s willing to put its racism aside, just to wreck things for women” (Emery, May 2, 2008).

Four months after Obama’s appearance, but only new two episodes of *SNL* due to the writers’ strike in 2007, Clinton went on the show on March 1, 2008. Her appearance also fell on the Saturday after her last debate with Obama before the Democratic Primaries. This fact is

interesting to note because in that debate Clinton referenced *SNL* and their portrayal of Obama and the media bias toward him. She quoted a previous skit, in which Amy Poehler played Clinton and Fred Armisen portrayed Obama, by mentioning that maybe “we should ask Barack if he is comfortable and needs another pillow” (“Hillary Clinton Recalls,” 2008). Three days after that debate, Clinton had a cameo appearance on *SNL* as an Editorial Response to the debate and a spoof of the debate that aired just prior to her in the show. In her response she discreetly alluded to the ‘uncanny’ similarities between the spoof and the real debate, humorously mentioned that the skit cannot be taken as “an endorsement of one candidate over another,” and then mentioned how much she “absolutely adore[s] Amy’s impression” of her. Then Amy Poehler, dressed identically to Clinton, approached her and they joked about the outfit and then Clinton’s laugh/cackle. When Poehler asked Clinton how her campaign is going, Clinton responds by saying “very well. Very, very well. Why- what have you heard?” referring to Clinton’s downward trend in the polls at that time, and then she closed the skit with the traditional open (Michaels, 2008p).

During her sketch Clinton stated that she was “just so happy to be back in New York” and the crowd responded with a few ‘whoops’ and cheers for the New York Senator. Clinton’s affiliation with the state could have exaggerated the responses of the live audience, but because the Internet is available in all states, this should not bias viewers’ comments in any way. As stated in the methodology, this study focused on viewers’ comments directly from the NBC website. However, a problem arose when trying to study viewers’ responses to this video of Clinton because there were only two posted comments on the NBC site. The lack of posts on the site could be for many reasons, but perhaps it is because the content was not very controversial. Previously studied videos had millions of views and thousands of comments, but those videos

were of Senator McCain and Governor Palin on the show. Those were perceived to be more controversial because they were down in the polls, it was close to Election Day, and they were Republican candidates appearing on a traditionally liberally biased show. Clinton, conversely, appeared eight months before the election and she had not been announced as the Democratic Party's nominee. If she had been the official Democratic candidate, there might have been more to say about her appearance on the show. Because she performed on the show months before the election and before McCain appeared, and stuck to general political humor, she might have escaped the spotlight and criticism for doing so. For the purposes of this study, viewer comments from other sites and blogs on the Internet were used. The posts that actually appear on the NBC video site contain an idea for a 'Clinton pretending to act like Palin' skit, and a general comment of support from a woman in Ohio writing that "She is great and it is wonderful that you put her on SNL. Tackful [*sic*], too." (Michaels, 2008p).

Just as McCain did after her, Clinton employed a bit of self-deprecating humor to poke fun at herself and, presumably, bond with the audience and gain trust and likableness (Bippus, 2007). These motives were validated with some of the positive responses Clinton received for her appearance. An anonymous poster on a Sun Times board wrote that "Her appearance on SNL is just another look at the woman that [he/she] feel has all it takes to lead this country. She can be tough as nails, she is not a quitter and she has a long track record of public service. And, she's funny!" Viewer Chris thanked *SNL* for the "wickedly funny" video stating that he felt "a bit vindicated by" *SNL*'s portrayal of Clinton and that the show "has more courage than most of our leaders." The two generic posts on nbc.com expressed their approval and enjoyment of the skit. This was not the majority of responses, however, and Clinton's stereotype as a "whiny," "powerful" "bitch" preceded her in this video. Most posters expressed criticism for *SNL* and their

bias toward Clinton in portrayals and with this skit. Sue from Massachusetts commented that “Hillary's appearance on SNL is a blatant display of her power, influence and connection to the establishment (yes, Lorne Michaels, this includes you).” Contributor Allen wrote that *SNL* is “in the bag for Clinton” with publicity that should “count as some sort of in-kind campaign contribution.” He went on to say that “Clinton’s whining about the media is tiresome, as is her candidacy” and Angelina Aguilar wrote that *SNL* showed “support and endorsement for this one individual” and they made “biased comments” and “racist coverage of Senator Obama.” She also said that she had “higher hopes with SNL,” and that they “lost one more viewer.” Poster Sally brought attention to candidates’ and viewers’ standards for strategies and where they get their news. She wrote, “Since when was SNL authoritative, high-standard journalism? If your campaign rests on a COMEDY show that is mostly watched by teens, you've got problems” (*Sun Times*, 2008).

Overall, Hillary Clinton’s one appearance on *SNL* during her campaign to become the Democratic Presidential Nominee did influence some voters’ perceptions about her. Because she appeared early in the race, was not the official nominee and only discussed general political and fashion humor, there were not many online comments on nbc.com, but there were viewer comments on other sites online with varied ‘readings’ of the skit.

Barack Obama- 11/3/07

During the race for the Democratic nomination, and exactly one year before the *SNL Presidential Bash*, Senator Barack Obama appeared on *SNL*. His campaign was fraught with troubles, mishaps and rumors from Jeremiah Wright and William Ayers, to claims that he is a Muslim and not a U.S. citizen. Race played a factor in his candidacy and campaign from the

beginning, even to the point that critics claim instances of reverse-racism. Geraldine Ferraro quit as a Clinton fundraiser after some race remarks concerning Obama. She was published in an interview stating that "If Obama was a white man, he would not be in this position. And if he was a woman [of any color], he would not be in this position. He happens to be very lucky to be who he is" (Abcarian, March 13, 2008). She was criticized as being "racist" for these comments, but she defended them saying they were true and that she thought the campaign and journalists were being reverse-racist and singling her out because she is white. Race debates like these surrounded his campaign, but they did not find their way on to *SNL* message boards regarding race.

Obama's appearance on *SNL* was months before Democrats chose him as the Party's nominee and a whole year before Election Day. He was on the show for the opening skit of a Halloween party at the Clintons' house. All the candidates running for the nomination were portrayed by actors, including Amy Poehler as Clinton, Jason Sudekis as Joe Biden along with others playing Chris Dodd, John Edwards, Bill Richardson, Mike Gravel and Dennis Kucinich. The skit satirized the race with Biden and Dodd in identical Spongebob costumes implying that the two candidates "really cancel each other out," Mike Gravel in a straight jacket, which was not meant to be a costume, and Hillary Clinton in a wedding gown which everybody thought was a witch costume. The last to join the party, a man in an Obama mask walked in and, when Clinton asked who is under the mask, he took off the mask to reveal that it was, in fact, Obama. After the crowd reacted with prolonged applause and cheering, Obama explained that he dressed as himself because he had "nothing to hide," and that he was "not going to change who [he] is just because it's Halloween." Hillary was annoyed, but then Obama complimented her on her bride costume- the first person to get it right (only for Bill Clinton to say she was a witch

immediately after). The skit ended when Obama “let the American people know that: Live From New York, It’s Saturday Night!” (Michaels, 2007).

Obama’s race was not a target on the skit and some viewers and media stories attribute this lack to the fact that perhaps NBC and *SNL* did not want to viewers to perceive them as racist. However, the majority of all comments posted for this video were not even about Obama. All the previously studied videos had strings of comments online about the politics of the candidates and general ranting about the election. The focus of this video’s comments was the humor of the other candidates’ portrayals, and the fact that the *SNL* videos were not available to viewers outside of America. I could not find many comments about Obama’s appearance on the show on the video’s message board so I used comments from the NBC message board under an *SNL* thread to understand how viewers received the skit. The comments I could find about this video mostly referred to the actors, and not Obama’s appearance. Viewer laughesalot mentioned that the skit “was funny” and the “two guys coming in as Spongebob is priceless” and Angie thought the “sketch was witty” and laughed at “Horatio [Sanz] and the moderator” and called it “good stuff.” Poster Bubba commented on perceived breaks in continuity of Hillary’s blouse, and all Zach had to write was “Horatio!!!” referring to the guest appearance of former cast member Horatio Sanz. This skit did influence some viewers as well. Poster Joanna wrote that “SNL saves one’s faith in America!” and voutenixz commented that politicians make “the best guests in shows like this” because “they actually have a really good sense of humour [*sic*].” Race was only mentioned in one comment from tubekiter who noted the lack of racial jokes. He wrote that NBC “won’t allow SNL to ridicule Obama because he is Black,” but now they can use the Clintons or Joe Biden to “play the dummy” while Obama “can play the straight man.” He also gave suggestions as to how *SNL* can “do presidential humor without ridiculing [*sic*] the Black

president” because *SNL* has “had most of it’s [*sic*] recent success by mocking the president” and this will “enable them to continue.”

The Obama video had around 50 comments, but there were many fewer comments than the Palin, and McCain appearances. This skit seemed to be one of the least controversial candidate appearances because of the small number of comments even pertaining to the skit. This is possibly because Obama was the front-runner in the Party when he appeared, it was months before any other major candidates appeared, it was a full year before Election Day, and perhaps because viewers, as did the majority of America in the election, preferred him to the other candidates. Viewers commented on Palin’s qualifications, McCain’s age and Clinton’s demeanor, but when Obama went on the show they commented on Horatio Sanz and the “Spongebob guys” (Michaels, 2007). Race may have been a factor in viewers’ enjoyment and usage, but only from the skit’s lack of racial references. The Halloween party skit was Obama’s only appearance on *SNL*, but it was not originally intended to be. Obama was scheduled to appear as a guest in the season premiere alongside Olympic champion Michael Phelps on September 13, 2008, but he cancelled the appearance due to hurricane Ike (“Live From New York,” 2008; Orloff, September 13, 2008). Some viewers of the McCain, Palin and Clinton appearances complained that the show was showing bias toward those candidates because of their multiple appearances or proximity to Election Day. Overall, Obama’s appearance on *SNL* had the least influence on viewers, but as Garth wrote on the influence of politicians on television, “the fact they are there and it is on the air makes it important” (Linsky, 1983).

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF ONLINE COMMENTS REGARDING PORTRAYALS OF CANDIDATES IN SKITS

This chapter looks at responses and comments made on the actual *SNL* sketches with actors portraying the candidates. There were many sketches including these characters over a two-year period, and accordingly every single one were not studied. This chapter is broken down into five subcategories: John McCain-Darrell Hammond, Sarah Palin-Tina Fey, Hillary Clinton-Amy Poehler, Barack Obama-Fred Armisen and Joe Biden-Jason Sudekis. The clips are first briefly summarized and then looked at in relation to viewers' comments. Each candidate's subcategory features at least three skits in which they were parodied, with an effort to use skits that portrayed the candidate alone, with an opponent, and with a running mate. Most of the skits featuring Amy Poehler as Hillary Clinton received very few comments so more skits of this portrayal are analyzed than the other candidates. These comments are studied and analyzed in the same way the comments about the candidates' appearances: by summarizing the skit, categorizing the comments and discussing possible influence of the viewers' perceptions of the candidates.

John McCain- Darrell Hammond

The first skit to be analyzed is the "McCain Recording Session" skit that originally aired on September 20, 2008. Darrell Hammond portrays Senator McCain in a recording studio working with his campaign executives to record campaign advertisements. The script pokes fun at McCain's age by making him unaware of digital technology in recording when he asks if the "tape spools were scratched or warped" and if "digital" meant "with your fingers." The characters go on to record some humorous and sarcastic attack ads against Barack Obama such

as claiming “universal healthcare” means “healthcare for the entire universe...including Osama Bin Laden,” and comparing Obama to Charles Barkley, Al Sharpton, OJ Simpson, Michael Vick and the monster from the movie *Predator*. The McCain character asks about the questionable methods of attack advertising because he promised to “raise the level of integrity and the political discourse” during his campaign, but he is assured that all statements are technically factual so he “approves this message.” The main theme of this skit is to humorously criticize campaign advertising techniques, mudslinging candidates and of course to make fun of John McCain’s age and political campaign.

There were 162 comments on this video from the time it was posted immediately following the live show to the end of Election Day on November 4, 2008. Many of the comments acknowledged the humor of the skit like poster JBC15157 who wrote “This is the funniest skit I have seen in a while, and true to a T,” nella1 who was glad “to see SNL getting back to its more “‘edgy’ roots”” because “they’ve always done things to shock,” and Ehrlic who posts that *SNL*’s “over the top satire is gold.” As with most comments, there were also direct contradictions to these comments, such as ChristinaMariaV who posts that “this SNL stuff still wears a condom, ‘safe comedy’” and that other posters “are so desperate for humor [they] praise SNL for what it should do every week...entertain.” She goes on to point out *SNL* “would be much funnier if they ever attack Obama” in their skits which is another prominent theme in the comments.

Many posters felt the show was very biased in their attacking parodies of McCain and Palin, while not parodying Obama and Biden as harshly. Commenter Agentfostergrant writes that *SNL* skits are “one-sided, classless, tasteless...soooo tired” and if “the show had any credibility it would have stuff on ‘THE CHOSEN ONE.’” Drummermike asks “where r the obama/biden skits?” CristinaMariaV reiterates that “MSNBC is like a 24 hour infomercial for the

democratic party and SNL is following right in line....rip Obama a new one for...the sake of comedy.” Again in the spirit of debate, poster AmericanEvolution counters her post by explaining “generally SNL make fun of the things most visible on TV like the mudslingin John McCain spots on every commercial break. Republicans have most often been the butt-end of jokes...because of the current president...[but] before that? Everyone made fun of Clinton.” This recording session skit did not seem to influence many viewers’ perceptions of John McCain, but it did reinforce some of their beliefs about him and his campaign strategy. Poster r_bob1965 thanks *SNL* for doing “what the rest of the media has been to scared or stupid to do...cut through the BS and get to the heart of the matter. McCain can’t seem to tell the truth.” This skit reinforced to American_Truthman that “The Republican party believes that it is not only OK, but imperative to lie and cheat in order to win elections. This skit just underlines what all clear headed Americans already know,” and caitlin_x writes, “This is great. McCain has no integrity....[and] is ‘stretching’ the truth.” Longhornredhead has “a feeling this skit isn’t too far off base,” and feels McCain does not keep his word- just like in the skit. Commenter PerilousPoozer feels the *SNL* skit is just reinforcing reality because McCain “has already approved ads not far from what SNL parodies.” The only commenter on this skit who seemed to be influenced by the video is missuestar, a self-identified undecided voter. She “think[s] that it is so obvious that [*SNL*] is biased for Obama...[and] you are turning me off only because of your bias.” She implores *SNL* to “even things out so that [she] can stop resenting” Obama. This form of influence is actually very different than the kind the show tends to exhibit on other viewers of other skits. Most viewers find that since the show leans toward the democratic side, that more viewers are influenced against McCain and toward Obama (Michaels, 2008g). Overall, this skit was not as controversial as others, most likely due to the lack of portrayal of Sarah Palin, and

that it was first aired over a month before Election Day.

The second skit analyzed for John McCain was the portrayal of the second presidential debate against Fred Armisen's characterization of Obama that originally aired on October 9, 2008. This skit was the main portion of the new *Weekend Update Thursday* show created specifically to further cover and parody the election politics. The skit was a debate parody highlighting Tom Brokaw (played by Chris Parnell) as the moderator and the candidates' inability to meaningfully answer the questions in a timely manner. Darrell Hammond parodies McCain's performance by constantly calling out Obama on issues, being a "Maverick" who is not even popular among Republicans, calling all the questioners by the wrong names, and by wandering around the stage in front of the camera and behind Obama when he is not speaking (similar to an actual incident during the real debate).

There were 93 comments on this skit from when it was posted to the end of Election Day. The main trend of the comments on this skit was viewers debating politics not relevant to the skits, and those comments were therefore categorized as irrelevant/ miscellaneous. The majority of the remaining comments were about how great the skit was and how perfect the impersonations were. Poster nightowl795 writes that it was "certainly the best debate skit. There was an equal amount of poking fun at each candidate," and dorian9 states "the more i watch this the better it gets." Miz_Bee thinks Parnell's Brokaw character was "The BEST impression ever!!!" and mterul24 loves how "they played on the candidates wandering aimlessly in the background" because she noticed that watching the real debate. Dotjon4 writes, "Darrell Hammond is PURE Genius! They all sound like the characters they were 'playing' ... SNL ALWAYS does its best material during Election times!" Poster MythBuster writes that he has watched *SNL* since it came on TV and "this debate spoof is one of the best ever." He compares it

to the third debate spoof (which will be analyzed below) writing that “the third debate looked like nothing more than political opinion making” and that is not what he found in this second debate spoof. Marjorienpuppy agrees that it “was a perfect Tom Brokaw voice,” but disagrees about the McCain and Obama impersonations as neither “hits the mark” for her. As with the first McCain skit analyzed, no viewers commented that the skit influenced them. There were a few whose perceptions of the candidates were reinforced by this skit such as ReddyRighter who posts thanks to *SNL* “for reminding us both candidates are imperfect (not just McCain).” CleyMasseur states that he already decided to vote for Obama/Biden before watching the skit and “none of this changes [his] mind, but its entertainment with substance” and American history that is getting better each day. The only commenter that seemed to have any views about the candidates change is TheNick who writes “this made Obama look more intelligent than he actually is. He should be a preacher not a politician.” Although he most likely already had a negative view of Obama, he admits this portrayal made Obama look better than the actual Obama (Michaels, 2008w). Again, this skit was not that controversial and received as mostly humorous to the online viewer who commented. Even though the skit aired closer to Election Day, it did not influence many viewers and was even singled out as a more “fair” and even-handed parody.

The third presidential debate parody was also featured as the opening segment of the *Weekend Update Thursday* show that originally aired on October 16, 2008. This skit portrays the final debate between the two candidates and specifically highlights some of the ways each candidate attacked the other throughout the campaign. The moderator, Bob Scheiffer played by Chris Parnell, claims that Obama’s campaign used words like “erratic,” “out of touch,” “lying,” “senile,” “dementia,” and “nursing home,” to characterize McCain. Obama, again portrayed by Fred Armisen, counters by claiming McCain’s campaign said things like “traitor,” “kill him,”

and “off with his head” about Obama at his rallies. The rest of the skit continues to portray McCain as senile while talking about his invisible friend “Joe the Plumber” (in reference to the actual person at an Obama rally) who he would nominate to his Cabinet and the unicorn named Simon who lives in his closet.

The third presidential debate skit received 89 comments from when it was posted on October 16th, until Election Day on November 4th. Unlike the previous two skits, the posts on this skit comment on an overwhelming theme. The majority of commenters wrote that the skit was very one-sided and NBC/SNL went out of their way to negatively portray McCain while sparing Obama. Poster RealityCheque points out that they “try to make fun of the way Obama speaks” but it doesn’t really work whereas “they sort of...over-caricature McCain....It’s funny but not very fair.” Even poster tothewire, who by observation repeatedly posts nothing but links to his own website, writes “Loved the clip! I have to agree that it was a bit one sided.” Jethro421 attributes the one-sidedness to the fact that Obama won the debate so “SNL has to go one sided-all against McCain.” However, most of the other posters who noted the skit’s bias blamed it on SNL and/or NBC. Dixon1933 states he has been a long time fan of *SNL*’s political satire, but it ended with this skit because “there was not a single negative joke about Obama the entire show and McCain was made to look like a complete loon. SNL and NBC should be ashamed.” Poster dalaimo describes the bias of the political satire by writing “At it's best, it portrays all candidates in a humorous light and is enjoyed by all viewers. At its worst, it serves as a political platform for one candidate. I am very disappointed at SNL's inability (or unwillingness) to appear unbiased. If your writers find little to laugh about in their characterization of Obama, they either lack talent or are following a prescribed format.” IGFESHWA says it a little more directly with “Why is SNL such a chicken squat when it comes to getting down and dirty about Obama???”

GOblue09 directly calls out *SNL* by asking why they don't "pull [negative material about Obama] out of the bag. It couldn't be that it's not PC could it? Or then again maybe its not in there own political interest is it." As with all the skits, this vein of comments has a rebuttal by other posters. Thorsgoddess28 claims that *SNL*'s portrayal is only making McCain out to be a "loon" because from "watching the debates....they're [the portrayals] spot on...and almost to the end [McCain] looked like a bottle rocket waiting to explode... While Obama is always cool under any fire."

Similar to the actual candidates' appearances, the greater the controversy, the more potential influence the skit has. Many posters' perceptions of John McCain were reinforced with this skit such as MadProud who writes, "John McCain has not a clue how to interact with the public. This man is Ang-Gree," and aussieundecided acknowledges the show's influence because he is "glad the mccain propaganda is sinking in! The smear campaign almost wasn't getting through." There were even a few posters whose perceptions of John McCain were influenced by this skit. NicoleM references the influence by writing, "It is through spots like these where many of our young population shape their political opinions. SNL puts a hilarious spin on facts." Butterflyxo actually "like[s] the SNL version of McCain better than the real John McCain because he's alot less angry," so even if she can tell the difference between reality and the parody, Hammond's portrayal did influence her perception of the real McCain. Divine_Wind was influenced even further. She "watched all four debates since [she] was an 'undecided,'" and the debates helped her make a decision. She agrees the skits seem "a bit one-sided by making Sen. McCain sillier than Sen. Obama it's because McCain did look sillier compared to Sen. Obama's cool statesmanship during the entire debate." Watching the actual debates was

complemented with the *SNL* parodies of the debates to help her make her decision (Michaels, 2008x).

The comments from these three skits highlight some positive and negative attributes of John McCain as well as Darrell Hammond's portrayal of him. As found with the actual candidates' appearances, the more controversial the skit, and the closer the skit aired to Election Day, the more comments were posted and the more influence the skit had on the viewers.

Sarah Palin- Tina Fey

Tina Fey's portrayal of Sarah Palin garnered international attention and was featured on traditional news shows as well as other comedy shows. Fey was praised for her uncanny resemblance to the Governor as well as her caricature of Palin's voice and mannerisms. The skits portraying Palin were the most popular skits on nbc.com measured by views and comments. The portrayal and media attention even led to Gov. Palin appearing on the show herself of which an estimated 86% of Americans heard about at least a little bit, after her appearance in late October 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2008). Fey appeared as Palin in six skits before Election day and the skits with the most comments were chosen to analyze to get as much information as possible about how viewers might have been influenced by the portrayal.

Reporter Katie Couric interviewed Gov. Palin on *CBS Evening News* and the network aired it in two parts on September 24 and 25, 2008. Just two days later on the 27th Tina Fey made her second appearance as Palin on *SNL* in a parody skit of that interview with Amy Poehler as Couric. The skit portrayed Palin as a complete bimbo who could only spout off talking points about the bailout, the economy, healthcare reform, and taglines such as 'Freddie and Fannie' and 'Maverick.' However, this skit is different than any other on *SNL* for this election because Fey

controversially used some of Palin's answers word for word from the interview transcript ("Tina Fey Quotes," 2010; "CNN laughs it up," 2008).

This skit had 894 comments before Election Day, and only a portion of the posters knew and/or commented that some of the lines were from the actual interview. Some posters, most likely tired of all the political debates on the message boards, wrote things like love42134 such as "THIS IS JUST A TV SHOW!!! It is NOT real. It was made for laughter!" However, these comments were quickly outnumbered by backlashes such as "the sad thing is...SNL didn't make Palin look bad. Her actual interview with Katie Couric said it all," from VTach and Wtcurtit who repeated "the scariest part of this sketch is the rambling economy response is actually **word-for-word** straight from the real interview. Poster EARS thought the skit "was hilarious until [he] watched a show...where they played this parody and the Couric interview side by side and [he] realized that after the bailout question Tina Fey quoted Sarah Palin word for word! Now I am sickened and saddened." Commenter estm8ted humorously wrote, "I thought this was going to be the SNL spoof...not the real *Evening News* interview...I wanted to see Tina Fey!" A comment from Figaro14 sums it by saying "this isn't satire any longer, it's reportage! This IS Sarah Palin." One poster, H_E_Pennypakcer, put this skit's portrayal into historical perspective: "The Chevy Chase-Gerald Ford and the Darrell Hammond- Bill Clinton spoofs were clear exaggerations but all Fey has to do is recite Palins lines and it gets laughs! This is frightening..." Poster nonyabidness reiterates that idea by writing "I bet Sarah know how President Ford felt about Chevy Chase." A comment from sjf57 summarizes many viewers' posts: "How very sad for our country when parody and the actual news interview are indistinguishable."

Despite the negative portrayal and the co-opted lines from the real interview, there were several viewers who claimed they were Republican, conservative and/or fans of Sarah Palin who

loved the skit. For example, ch676 wrote the skit was “tremendously funny! And [she is] a Republican...” and themole wrote, “Lovely Fey was dead on...but I’m still voting for her and Johnny Mac!” Some were quick to point out to opposing commenters that the ‘right’ side has a sense of humor about the portrayals of the VP candidate such as caw22 who states, “I am a conservative and I thought this was hysterical! Yes I know it is hard for liberals to think we have a sense of humor but we do :-)...I have a feeling Governor Palin even enjoys it.” Poster trumpetogal37 concurs by writing, “I love Sarah Palin, but Tina Fey does an AWESOME impression of her. Everyone needs to be made fun of at least a couple times in their lives.”

Some self-identified Palin fans enjoyed the humor, but were quick to point out any flaw with the portrayal like poster exhippie who writes “Tina Fey is certainly quite funny and talented. As a McCain/Palin supporter I thank you. You see we on the right do have a sense of humor...although the Katie Couric character was not good” because she has much more of a ‘left’ side, but “of course busting on Katie would be blasphemous, and not politically correct.” Commenter driedmangoez states she is a McCain/Palin supporter and “thought this was hilarious,” but “Tina should work on the accent though, she has more twang than is necessary or even needed.” Some noted the disparity between the show’s critical portrayals of Sarah Palin and the less harsh characterization of Obama and Biden. Poster dfwgirl “love[s] McCain and Palin and love[s] Republicans] can take a joke. But of coarse [*sic*] its more PC to bash a woman than a black man.” Many viewers thought the caricature of Palin was too harsh to the point of not being funny. Poodit writes, “this was overlong, and relatively mean-spirited. Nowhere as funny as the first [portrayal],” and unreel states “ there can be a fine line between funny and disgusting...this is becoming degrading for women, enough is enough already” and also asks why *SNL* doesn’t parody the “stupid REAL things that Joe Biden says all the time!” Boostah notes that “what was

conspicuously absent from SNL however was a parody of Joe Biden. Considering his many gaffs in the last two weeks one would think if SNL was really seeking the funny versus pushing a political agenda they would spoof Biden” and he goes on to call NBC the National Barack Channel which is “infect[ing] SNL as well.” Average_JoeMN shares those sentiments when he asks *SNL* if they have “any plans to equally mock the New Messiahor perhaps his VP plagiarist running mate who can’t seem to go a sentence without his foot being firmly planted in his mouth?...Sorry- my bad...I forgot NBC’s an O&O of the DNC.” Poster galegal writes a backlash to these Republican-leaning comments: “Not sure if those pro Palin who saw the humor or those who didn’t worry me more.”

This skit was interpreted to be controversial based on the number and varying views represented in the comments section. Just as the McCain skits and the actual appearances, this means there were quite a few comments suggesting a change in perception or influenced view about Sarah Palin based on this skit. Many viewers claimed they had not seen the real interview until watching this parody. Elle758 had “read about the Palin-Couric interview,” but had not had a chance to watch. After watching the sketch she “assumed it was the typical satire/gross exaggeration” until she watched the actual interview and “realized the SNL skit wasn’t overstating anything.” Ndemps also watched the skit first and then “naturally had to look up what really transpired.” By watching the skit first, these viewers were already influenced by the portrayal when they watched the actual interview and were influenced in their perceptions of Sarah Palin’s responses. The influence the skit had on some was to stop watching *SNL* altogether because it was too harsh and biased. Self-identified independent voter who “could care less for both major parties,” UXNpower thought, “this sketch was nothing more than a series of hateful insults against Gov. Palin and Republicans in general... Women in the US are still portrayed and

treated like idiots.” Poster Yurfulla thinks, “SNL has crossed the line in its bias. [He] used to be a big fan” but now he only watches the newsworthy skits on YouTube “far from [SNL’s] advertising dollars.” As with all other message board threads, these comments had many opposing comments such as tank77 who is “a conservative Christian” who has no problem with what SNL does because “they are just using what characters they have and what is popular at the time. They are creating comedy not telling people how to vote.” Many posters agreed with the critical portrayal of Palin so much they were trying to influence other viewers’ perceptions of the candidate. Zevel376 writes, “every conscientious person in the US should see this,” and RA79 “encourage[s] and support[s] all spoofs of Sarah Palin,” because “people need to see this woman for what she is, dumb, naïve, backwards and if it’s through comedy then so be it!!!” Poster smarchi also tells Fey to “keep doing the Palin skits, maybe the folks that are voting for her and think that she is smart will get it and see how stupid she really is,” and MikeyinMiami asks everyone who cares about this country to “please forward Tina Fey’s skit to every McCann supporter you know!!!” The skit did have some influence on poster carolsthoughts perception of Palin. She claims she “Loved it! This swing voter is voting for Obama” because “Palin doesn’t have a clue.”

Another interesting trend in the comments for this skit is how, even though it may not have directly influenced their perceptions about Palin, many viewers intertwined Tina Fey’s character with the actual Sarah Palin. BraxtonHall also sees the connection on the message board and posits “what is even more funny [than the skit] is that you people actually relate what you see in the skit as actually the candidate!” This is evidenced by comments such as “tina fey is hilarious...or is it palin who’s hilarious b/c fey’s just imitating her...” Many posters think Tina Fey’s portrayal of Palin is even better than Palin herself. Marcel98 writes that “Tina Fey is just

like Palin, with a brain..." and mavrek thinks Fey "does and OUTSTANDING impression of" of Palin, but Fey comes "across much more intelligent than she is." AprilCall opposes this idea and writes, "cant you separate entertainment from reality? If this is the worst side of Sara, I love her more." Schwimmer17 seems to think the skits really did influence viewers. He states, "Of course america's going to believe these skits, they're going to be the deciding factor in this election (and I'm lovin' it). Some viewers even go so far to (sarcastically) have "a valid reason to vote Republican- FOUR YEARS OF TINA FEY DOING SARAH PALIN!!!" and DillardSisters even admits if she voted by her "SNL preferences, [she'd] vote for Palin so we could see more Fey sketches" but goes on to say she supposes the election "shouldn't be about electing the stupidest person for the sake of comedy." Poster cottonfromphoto uses Fey's portrayal as "yet another reason we should vote for OBAMA!!!" There was, of course, backlash to this line of thinking by other posters like Think4yrslf41 who "would seriously hope that someone would not vote for Palin just to see Tina Fey on SNL again." Commenter momoffour239 further looks at the idea of basing one's vote on SNL's portrayals. She writes, "Are we actually basing our vote on SNL comedy spoofs now??...What are we going to tell our children when they ask why we voted a certain way. Are we going to tell them, well honey SNL made them look dumb so I voted for the other guy?" Viewer 101 adds that "people should not be formulating their political opinions based on SNL skits. A satirical television show has no obligation to present anything in a fair or balanced way. It's entertainment!...Don't look to late night comedy for unbiased analysis!"

Many posters claim to have been influenced by the show even just a little bit, but whether or not the skit changed their votes will never be fully known. However, the Palin/Couric interview skit did actually make many viewers more informed about the election campaign because they did more research on the actual interview because of the skit. Fey's portrayal may

not have influenced every viewer's perceptions of Palin, but as commenter Josh1976 states, "These skits really put politics into perspective" (Michaels, 2008c).

The Vice Presidential Debate skit featuring Tina Fey as Sarah Palin and Jason Sudekis as Joe Biden originally aired on October 4, 2008 and has the second most comments of any skit during the 2008 election season. Guest cameo Queen Latifah portrays moderator Gwen Ifel as biased toward Barack Obama because of her new book, and mentions that "due to the historically low expectations for Governor Palin, were she simply to do an adequate job tonight, and at no point cry, faint, run out of the building or vomit... you should consider the debate a tie" to which Palin (Fey) nods in agreement. Jason Sudekis's portrayal of Joe Biden in this skit will be discussed in his section below, but in general he portrayed Biden as pompous, egotistical, and a good friend of John McCain who thinks McCain is a "raging maniac." Fey reprises her role as Palin to portray her as an overly folksy and cute pageant contestant by winking (as she actually did in the debate), dropping the 'g's from the end of all her words, and asking if they were going to do "the talent portion" and then playing her flute. The skit also parodies Palin's pandering to Florida voters by stating her love of "Jews and Cuban food," her supposed disbelief in the "climate change whozie whatsit" and her opposition to gay marriage and her unwed pregnant teenage daughter by defining marriage as "a sacred institution between two unwilling teenagers."

The comments on the VP debate skit very closely parallel the comments on the previous skit. The majority of the 1813 comment leading to Election Day was general political debates between commenters. There were also many general comments about the comedic factor such as "Mavericky!" "Welcome back SNL" "Joe Six-Pack" "Queen Latifah and Tina Fey are soooo funny!" and "lol." Many poster felt Fey's portrayal was "perfect" and "spot-on" and that "this is a perfect summary of" how the debate actually went. Poster thoughts writes "This was by far the

most interesting debate” of the *SNL* parodies and klf12469 concurs that “of all the redos of all the debates...this one is the best. It’s amazing that we can use humor to point out what is so true. Palin really has no clue.” Poster liketurtles writes, “It’s so funny...because that’s about as intelligent as she came across in the debate,” and monsieur305 posts “wow! Art imitates life. This is just a slightly exaggerated reenactment of the real debate. In retrospect I realize she doesn’t have a clue as to what is going on...” Borntoadorn writes that *SNL* has “portrayed her as the idiot she really is.” Commenter nboltz also puts this skit into historical perspective because “This is the best political commentary there is! ...20 years from now [her] great grandchildren will be watching videos of these SNL sketches in their history classes!” She specifically mentions the skits, and not the actual debates, will be remembered because of their accuracy and influence in the election.

Just like the previous skit’s comment there were several self-identified Republicans and conservatives who found this funny, but were not influenced by the portrayal. Poster vala_jackosn was “a fan of [Palin’s] long before [the Fey skits]” and urges her fellow Republicans to not “be so easily offended and have some fun with this. We have great candidates...now we get free media coverage too!” in reference to the media’s overwhelming coverage of Obama’s campaign. Poster treed23 also noted that the real “Sarah Palin just laughs about it! She doesn’t really care when they make fun of her” and she is “voting for McCain for other reasons BUT if [she] weren’t [she] would vote for McCain/Palin just to have another 4 years of Tina on SNL!” Also a staunch McCain reporter, jbrojbrojbro “thinks[s] that was funny as hell. The VP skits have been great. You gotta vote for [McCain/Palin], the uber-liberals will sensor any Obama skit as being politically incorrect.

There were also direct detractors who thought this portrayal went too far. Self-labeled as not a Palin fan, poster karillu “found Tina Fey’s impersonation to be downright cruel,” and fsunoles46 writes that “it’s getting old. It was wise at first for SNL to appeal to it’s liberal fanbase, but I think 3 weeks in a row is pushing this a bit further than it needs to be.” This skit’s comments also show the recurring theme of media bias favoring Obama/Biden. Hope77 is “so disappointed with” the media and *SNL* and asks why “our media is trying to destroy us?” In direct response to her however, dietgurl143 states, “the media is not trying to ruin us. They are trying to get Americans to use their brains before casting their vote. Some fans have even stopped watching *SNL* as much, like JoeyDG who will “watch less while they rip on Palin and McCain...Although a democrat and republican are shown side by side, it’s pretty apparent where the SNL people stand. Lightly teasing Biden while brutally attacking Palin isn’t right.” In direct contrast, there were many viewers who claimed they would now watch the show even more because of these skits. Poster Sroke writes, “I didn’t realize Saturday Night Live was this good. I think you’ve just won yourself a life long fan.”

This skit was one of the most controversial of the entire election season; so it follows that there would also be several viewers who claim to be influenced by this skit’s portrayals. Just as with the Couric/Palin parody, many viewers hoped this skit would influence others’ perceptions of Palin and would therefore not vote for her. Comedyfan26 hopes the video “reach[es] a lot of people,” and mascmuscle35 writes that *SNL* is “helping America to realize what an IDIOT Sarah Palin is.” ShopGuy writes that these “already classic skits...need to be viewed by the greater public” and he is “amazed on how close comedy and reality seem to blend lately. Poster mslucas states, “Tina Fey and SNL have done more than make us laugh and appreciate the talent- they’re having an effect on voters...thank gawd.” Commenter madame2fly claims she and her family

and friends are “constantly exchanging texts, emails and phone calls regarding the Tina Fey series on Palin...It’s amazing the impact a little bit of comedy can have,” and PeaceMinister wonders “if it is any coincidence that the Obama/Biden ratings have increased since the SNL parodies began three weeks ago. The power of humor can help people see what is sometimes clouded by what they want to see.” Poster MattinGVA thinks the show is having so much of an impact that “if Obama wins...he should definitely give a shout-out to Tina Fey and Co. for their contribution” to his campaign. The only comment on this skit that seems to indicate direct influence on perception is from snowbyrd who “heard about this parody and now after seeing and hearing it, [she] is BLOWN BACK....this is a HOOT...OBAMA u have my VOTE!!!” Her comment indicates she had not fully decided to vote for Obama until after seeing the harsh caricature of Palin, which swayed her to vote for Obama.

As with the previous Palin portrayal skit, there seems to be a blurring of the line between Fey’s portrayal and the real Sarah Palin. Both AmandaPaige and zat cannot look at Palin without thinking of Fey and vice versa. Dorian9 writes that “art imitates life- this was so true with tina fey’s palin impression” and SNLsq asks, “How can we be sure that the woman that appears on Saturday Night Live is not really Sarah Palin?” Also like the Couric/Palin parody, many viewers jokingly commented that they would almost vote for Palin just to see more sketches from Tina Fey! Some even go further with their love of Fey, such as TheMoodyBlue who asks if there is “any way we could get Tina Fey to run for Vice President” instead of Palin, which was reinforced by many posts stating “Tina Fey for VP,” “Tina Fey for President!” or “McCain/Fey ’08.” One such post brought in Stephen Colbert and wrote “Colbert/Fey ’08!”

Since the majority of the posts on this skit were serious political debates that did not even mention the skit, there were multiple posts hoping to lighten the mood and reiterate that this was

a comedy show and viewers hoping other viewers were not seriously basing their votes on *SNL*. Commenter Eic finds “it frightening that folks are making their voting decisions based on a funny *SNL* skit....this was satire.” The debate and the politics became too much for Kasswax who humorously writes that “Red wine and Tina Fey are the only reasons I’m able to get through this election...you’re saving me” (Michaels, 2008y).

The third, and final, video skit analyzed for Fey’s portrayal of Palin is from the episode on October 18th, in which the real Governor Palin appears on the show. In the Candidates’ Appearances chapter, the real Palin’s cameo was analyzed from the “Backstage” video on *SNL*’s website. That video focuses more on Palin and does not include all of Fey’s impersonation. This section focuses on Fey’s portrayal of Palin, so the actual skit, which aired live on television, is analyzed, and Palin’s actual appearance will not be discussed much further. Fey’s character holds a press conference in which she does not answer any of the questions asked, answers questions that were not asked with ‘cutesy’ talking point answers and demonstrates some “fancy pageant walkin.”” Meanwhile, backstage the real Palin speaks with Executive Producer Lorne Michaels about how she disapproves of the skit because it was not how her press conference would have actually gone. Palin makes a few Tina Fey jokes about her show *30 Rock* while actor Alec Baldwin butts in to the conversation. He ‘mistakes’ Palin for Tina and proceeds to berate the Governor. After Lorne introduces Alec to the ‘real’ Sarah Palin, the audience sees more of Fey’s impersonation. Then Baldwin rushes on stage to tell Fey that the real Palin is here. Fey rushes off the stage and only shares the camera shot with the real Palin for less than one second. It must be noted that, contrary to popular belief and media reports, Michaels actually donated the maximum amount to John McCain’s campaign, and did not donate at all to Barack Obama’s campaign (Federal Election Commission, May 11, 2007). Although, the appearance by well-

known liberal Baldwin, and Fey's obvious unwillingness to share the stage with Palin, suggest the actors and *SNL* disapprove of Governor Palin and her candidacy.

This skit had the most comments out of any of the election season parodies with 2151 comments in less than 20 days before the election. However, of these the majority were long and continued political debates between the commenters. The rest of the comments were scattered with the same sentiments as the previous two skits- that Palin was really as dumb as they were portraying her, that Fey and Palin were so similar, the skits were not fair and were biased toward Obama/Biden, the skits were too harsh or not harsh enough, noting the lack of Biden skits, and general comments of how funny the skit was. However, there were two new trends of topics in this thread that have not been previously discussed: fans wanting to see the two perform together, as well as sexism against and comparing Palin and Fey.

As mentioned in the summary, Sarah Palin and Tina Fey only shared the camera for less than one second. Many viewers were disappointed they did not share more time, dialogue and even suggested other skits they should have done together. Jeanrex hoped Palin "would have shared time together with Tina Fey," and inappeasable still "get[s] one confused with the other sometimes...[and thinks] it would've been GREAT if they had done something TOGETHER at the same time!" Viewer LeoJen74 "was hoping to see a skit starring Palin spoofing Fey's American Express commercial," and ObamaRama wanted to see a skit where both Fey and Palin dress the same and "try to prove to the press who the real Sarah Palin is" so she could have been more involved with the skits. Many of the commenters sensed the reason Palin and Fey did not appear together was due to politics and Fey disapproving of Palin. JustinSFCA viewed Fey's attitude "like 'BYE!' I can't wait till next week, so we can go back to being really mean" and Fey was just "laughing AT" Palin and not "with" her. Poster BarackRocks08 points out the exact

time code the two passed each other and writes, “Unless it was an act, the look that Sarah Palin gave to Tina Fey in those 2 seconds looked almost like Sarah wanted to slug Tina.”

JonDinFlorida was “shocked seeing both Fay and Palin together!” and thought the skit was so great that “someone has trumped President Clinton appearing on the *Arsenio Hall Show!*” Many posters categorize Palin’s individual performance as “unremarkable” and unfunny compared to Tina Fey’s “genius” impersonation. WilliamKurk2000 thought “Tina Fey was funny, but Palin wasn’t...she was just there, sort of how she is right now in the campaign...a REAL press conference from Palin would be funnier than Tina Fey’s portrayal of it, that’s if she were to ever give one.” Some viewers, like mstovea, were almost offended that *SNL* had the real Palin on because “Tina Fey is absolutely amazing and talented. Why the heck was the real Palin there. Tina does such a great job as her...the real Palin through the show off.”

This skit was the first time during analysis there were more than just a few comments about sexism on the show. The comments range from “hot! Hot! Hot! Charming! Wheeew..” and “Tina Fey is Foxy...baw chicka waw waw,” to more serious comments about how Palin was unfairly treated by the show because she is a woman. Poster Dem4McCainPalin addresses *SNL*: “You people should be ashamed of yourselves, to disrespect that woman like that. I will never watch *SNL* again.” Another poster, mcsooncer, thinks, “Tina Fey needs to get her priorities straight. We need strong women at the top and Sarah Palin is one. Tina, shame on you for your portrayals of Sarah,” and wishes Tina would depict Palin as “she really is...a strong SMART woman...” WorkingMom3 continues in this vein criticizing Fey’s depiction of Palin: “So a hot, young woman can’t be an effective leader? It’s obvious that Fey’s depiction of Palin only further plays on America’s inability to take women seriously in the work place, and thanks to *SNL* for legitimizing it.” Teresa26 is “ashamed of the way *SNL* who is supposed to be pro-

woman...[shows skits] belittling women and betraying a woman of her dignity and of deep intelligence...Tina would do well to listen and learn [from Palin].” There were also many posts comparing the two women’s looks, as Alec Baldwin did in the skit by saying “I can’t believe they let her.....play.....you” with gestures referring to Palin’s curves and beauty, and “you look way hotter in person.” Poster lechery says the show “continues to validate [Palin’s] hotness, but verifies she has no substance!” Bryenjarrett writes, “Sarah Palin is way prettier than ‘Tina Palin’ [and is] smart beautiful [and] amazing” while at the same time nikkilove227 “loves Tina Fey ...[and] tina is way way way x 100,000,000 more pretty than sarah.” As other commenters criticize the lack of skits portraying Obama negatively, SprtsMom compares sexism toward Palin to racism against Obama. She thinks that “SNL should do a comparative skit ‘just making fun’ of Obama. Can you imagine if Baldwin said ‘you look way blacker in person’ or if Obama sang a few bars of ‘Mammy’ to match Palin’s pageant walk? ...It will never be done- it’s PC to make fun of Palin but Obama is overly protected by PC taboos.”

Among the mixed reviews of Fey’s and Palin’s performance in this skit, there were still several viewers who were influenced by it. Self-identified Obama supporter JustAGuyinStLou thinks “Gov. Palin is a great sport about this and it does make me respect her more” even though he is not voting for her, and anotherobamamama writes, “Sarah Palin has gained more points with me over this appearance than any other she has made.” Palin supporter states, “This opening made me like Sarah Palin even more...[because] she had the guts to up against Tina Fey.” Undecided voter AnnieCommentsOnSNL “think[s Palin] and Tina showed they are classy women by the way the show was handled...[and as] for SNL last night Palin gets my vote! uGoGirl!” Jesusluv claims he didn’t like *SNL* or Sarah Palin, “but after last nights show...I’m changing my vote to McCain/Palin” (Michaels, 2008e).

The three skits with Tina Fey portraying Sarah Palin garnered relatively similar comments. Following the trend, the more controversial the skit the more comments and the more influenced perceptions. The skits portraying Palin differ from those of McCain because the comments outnumber his skits by thousands. This can mostly be attributed to the popularity of Fey's impersonation of Palin, and Palin's controversial nomination. Many viewers felt *SNL* was too harsh in their portrayal of Palin, while others thought it was not harsh enough. There were also criticisms of bias against Palin and toward Obama/Biden, and even claims of sexist treatment by *SNL* in portraying Palin. There were still several viewers who claimed to be influenced in their perception of Palin by Fey's portrayal in the skits.

Hillary Clinton- Amy Poehler

SNL parodied Hillary Clinton many times as the First Lady during Bill Clinton's presidency and several times during her campaign and terms for New York Senator. So it was not a new thing for viewers to see Hillary portrayed on the show, and it is impossible to know if any of these portrayals influenced viewers' perceptions of her as a presidential candidate years later. Perhaps this is why the skits of Amy Poehler portraying Hillary received the fewest comments of any of the candidates during the 2008 election season. As such, the four skits with the most comments will be summarized and analyzed to have a better understanding of how Senator Clinton is characterized in the videos and how some viewers may have been influenced.

The Halloween skit first aired on November 3, 2007 and is summarized above because it was also the singular appearance of Barack Obama on the show. Since that analysis focused on Obama, a brief summary will also be made here to focus on the characterization of Hillary. The skit shows Bill and Hillary Clinton hosting a Halloween party for all the democratic hopefuls.

Amy Poehler portrays Hillary as a controlling party host who gets upset at Bill for not wearing the groom costume to match her bride costume. His excuse is that “everyone knows we’re married!” to which she gets angry and doesn’t know how to respond. A few more jokes are made about the couple’s dynamic and references are made to Bill’s infamous infidelity. Meanwhile all the candidates seem to think her bridal gown is actually a witch costume, and when she corrects John Edwards he explains his thought process by saying it’s “all in how you wear it, I guess.” Candidate Bill Richardson approaches them to “suck up” to Hillary, as Bill claims it is only because they want to be her Vice President. Hillary responds that plenty of people are nice to him, but he replies that it is because people like him (insinuating that no one likes Hillary). When Barack Obama arrives at the party, Hillary’s character seems upset that he is there, and seems upset at his answers that “he doesn’t have to change who” he is in his best campaign speech voice. Overall this skit portrays Hillary to be a controlling “witch” who no one likes, as consistently upset with Bill, and annoyed at Obama.

As mentioned above, there were only 7 viewer comments on this skit. None of the comments actually refer to Hillary’s portrayal in this skit, but viewer Bubba does notice that the video’s still photo on the website shows Poehler wearing a red blouse underneath her costume that is not present in the actual video. (This discrepancy can most likely be attributed to the show’s process of a ‘live’ dress rehearsal before the show when they probably took the still.) The other comments refer to other characters portrayed in the skit like Senators Joe Biden and Chris Dodd wearing matching Spongebob costumes. There were more skits of Hillary than of McCain, Palin or Biden, but there were fewer comments and not much controversy surrounding the portrayal. It follows then, that no real influence on viewers’ perceptions of Hillary was documented from this skit (Michaels, 2007).

At the height of the Hillary Clinton's campaign against Barack Obama to become the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, *SNL* aired a skit satirizing an attack ad against Obama. It portrayed Obama as a helpless President who had to call Hillary every night to figure out what to do in foreign policy situations, handle domestic issues, and even how to turn on the heater in the White House. It also posits that Obama has taken up smoking again and uses profane language regularly. Poehler, as Clinton, speaks after the ad to explain there was no evidence to support any of these claims, but she urges voters to stop this possible future from happening and instead have "as safe, confident, more experienced future" then they should contact the Democratic National Committee. The skit did nothing new in the portrayal of Hillary- highlighting her more substantial experience over Obama and her sheer eagerness to win the election by being "unfair and deceptive."

There was only one comment written about this skit, and it was posted on October 5- 7 months after the skit originally aired. Viewer veryfunny writes, "She is an excellent Hillary!" Since Poehler's caricature of Hillary was not new and considered relatively mild, as well as the distance from Election Day, it follows that there are not many comments about this video, and therefore no influenced perceptions (Michaels, 2008).

Poehler again portrayed Clinton in an address to the audience as "The next President of the United States." *SNL* was criticized as being biased in favor of the local Senator and was announced as the next President more than once in skits. The address on May 10, 2008 portrayed Hillary in an attempt to sway super-delegates and the DNC to nominate her for President over Obama because the votes were "hopelessly dead-locked" at the time. Her reasons why she should be the next candidate were listed highlighted with graphics: She is a sore loser who will not support Obama, her supporters are racist and will not switch over to Obama, and she has no

ethical standards keeping her from fighting to win the election. Again, this is the same characterization of Hillary as a controlling, overly eager woman who is desperate to win the election.

There were only two comments about this skit on nbc.com, both posted in 5 months after the original airing and well after Obama chose Biden to be his running mate and after McCain chose Palin. Commenter HippiesforObama writes, “LOL this is so funny but none the less, Obama should have picked Hillary for VP. She would have kicked Palin’s butt!” He found humor in her portrayal and yet still supported her in higher office. The other comments is recurring post on several of these message boards suggesting *SNL* do a skit with Poehler portraying Hillary doing Palin by winking and speaking as a cutesy “dumb blonde act” (Michaels, 2008b). As with the 3am phone call skit, there was nothing new added to Poehler’s portrayal of Hillary and the skit originally aired months before Election Day, so there are not many comments and no real influence on perception.

By far the most popular skit portraying Hillary Clinton is the “Non-Partisan Message from Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton” skit in which Poehler, as Clinton, addresses the audience about sexism in the election campaign alongside Tina Fey playing Sarah Palin. The skit makes a stark comparison between Clinton and Palin calling Palin “sexy, attractive, beautiful” and a “MILF,” while referring to Clinton as a “harpy, shrew” and a “boner-shrinker” with “cankles.” Palin states that it is “time to put a woman in the White House” and mentions she is one step closer to it than Hillary was and then Hillary finally loses it screaming “MINE!! It’s supposed to be mine!” She goes on to criticize Palin’s stupidity and continues to show how desperately she wanted to be President and ends, “In conclusion, I invite the media to grow a pair. And, if you can’t, I will lend you mine.”

There were 968 comments from the time the skit originally aired on September 13 to Election Day a month and a half later. The majority of the comments about this video discuss Tina Fey's performance as Sarah Palin. Those comments are very similar to what was analyzed above in the Palin-Fey section. Since this section focuses on Amy Poehler's portrayal of Hillary Clinton, the comments analyzed here will focus on this. The main theme in the comments about both Fey and Poehler is how great of a job they did in the portrayal and how funny the skit is. The two actresses are hailed as comedic "geniuses" and "brilliant." Many commenters felt this skit is "an instant classic" and RachelMary calls the skit "the best scetch in the History of SNL!!!!!!!!!!" With all the traditional media attention surrounding Fey's impersonation of Palin, it seems Poehler's portrayal of Hillary was out-shadowed. However, that did not stop some viewers from noticing Poehler's true talent and the power of the comedy duo. Deeanek is glad that Tina Fey is back but is quick to add, "don't forget Amy Poehler is a genius too. In any case I love seeing them together." OutsiderLivinginside thinks Amy is "as funny or funnier than Tina" the more times she watches the video and TeamAndrews thinks, "Amy Poehler has been COMPLETELY underrated. AngelaWillhelm calls Fey and Poehler her "idols" and SittingNowLaughing says "tina and amy are the comedy team of this decade ranking with david spade and chris farley." King_David_Too states that "Tina Fey is the greatest and Amy Poehler has a bigger 'pair' than the entire press corps combined."

Poehler's portrayal of Hillary actually made viewers think about Hillary's campaign again and wonder about her current situation after she dropped out of the race. Even though they could no longer vote for Hillary in this election, the portrayal still did influence some viewers' perceptions of the real Hillary. Poster dmcluredvm writes, "It is great to let Hillary express some pent up frustration vicariously. I would so love to have watched Hilary watch this SNL

Opening!” DeVar gets “this biggest kick from Amy Poehler’s expressions an uncomfortable big laughter that we’ve come to know from Senator Hillary Clinton. Amy showed what Clinton could really be thinking and feeling. ABQGu writes that this portrayal of Hillary is “so close to the truth,” and while daveb50 disagrees as he “loved Tina’s spoof on Gov. Sarah Palin...the Hillary character was very dull.” This skit reminded rockytopva of Hillary’s campaign and he “hate[s] the idea that the DNC snubbed Hillary,” and fourlabs simply writes, “Poor Hillary, poor, poor Hillary!” TeamAndrews also states he “actually [doesn’t] like Hillary at all, but [he] can’t help but feel a bit sorry for her,” and piepirate24 thinks “that this was the only time I EVER liked Hillary Clinton.” Several other viewers commented that the skit encouraged them think, which inherently means the skit had some influence. Poster mahogany50 writes,

Not only is it hilarious, it was thought provoking. I hadn't given it much thought as to how Hillary Clinton would respond (If asked and truthful) to Palin's nomination or chances of being in the position that Hillary really wanted. The references to their qualifications was [*sic*] also something to really consider.

Gatorgirl86 continues this idea by claiming she “was more interested in what ‘Hillary’ had to say. Some thought-provoking comments from her, and actually a bit sad too.” Commenter kb1_1 thanks *SNL*

for showing us the real differences between someone of Hilary Clinton's political stature and experience, and this neophyte from Alaska who is capturing so much face time in the media just because she's pretty and new. Great use of political satire to tell the story we're not hearing from the McCain campaign.

Kaybaby362007 sent the skit to all her friends who don’t watch the show and PKchopper asks if there is “anyway we can force all of America to watch this?” in order to influence their opinions against Palin.

Like the previous skits there was quite a bit of general political debate, but this debate seemed to stay on topic more than the others. Since the skit was supposedly about sexism in the

political campaign, many viewers discussed and debated the idea that John McCain picked Sarah Palin as his running mate simply because she is a woman and could likely garner support from former Hillary voters. Jeff21045 explains this idea well: “It is so transparently obvious that McCain's choice of a women running mate was a grab for American women voters disgruntled about Hilary's unsuccessful run. This IS SEXISM. Furthermore, any American, man or women, who votes for McCain simply because he chose a female running mate is also, by definition, a SEXIST.” A few self-identified Hillary supporters, such as jasoncole, claim they changed their votes to Palin after Hillary was out of the race and EightBelles writes “I was a fervent Hillstar...now I am a Palen-tologist.” However, there was a bit of a backlash after people claimed they changed their minds from Hillary to Palin. Erinhush explains the opposing sentiment of many viewers: “anyone who was a Hillary supporter for the right reasons, not just the fact that she was a woman, would never support Gov. Palin. They are on completely different sides of the political spectrum.” Other detractors, such as eyesopen and Deelnatx, even go so far to claim the other commenters who are claiming they have changed from Obama to Palin/McCain are “most likely trolls for the Republican party there are actually Dems switching to the Republican ticket...WE ARE NOT FALLIN FOR IT! (Michaels, 2008k).” Whether the idea of fake posts about changing votes is true or not, there were still many viewers who were influenced by this skit’s message and even caused some people to have higher opinions of Senator Clinton even if their votes could not change anything for her at this time.

The earlier skits possibly did not have as many views because, as digibrill puts it, “That version of Hillary is vintage SNL by now” referring to the number of skits portraying Clinton for the past few years. Even though there were not many comments on most of the skits portraying Hillary Clinton, there were still many viewers whose perceptions about her were influenced.

Barack Obama- Fred Armisen

Throughout the comments on all the message boards on nbc.com, many viewers claim *SNL* was biased toward Senator Obama and his running mate and some even refer to NBC as the National Barack Channel. Several viewers are also appalled that the show could not find a Black man to portray Obama and had to rely on Fred Armisen, who is of Venezuelan, German and Japanese descent, to portray the Democratic candidate. It must be noted that this is not a new practice, or criticism, for *SNL*, as Darrell Hammond portrays Jesse Jackson regularly on the show. Armisen uses his ethnic ambiguity to portray a variety of characters ranging from Hispanic to Middle Eastern to European including big names like Hugo Chavez, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Desi Arnaz, Muammar al-Gaddafi and Laurence Welk, so he has experience blurring the ethnicity line in comedy (“SNL Transcripts”). Even with all the controversy and criticism surrounding Armisen’s portrayal of Obama, there were relatively few comments on the Obama skit videos in comparison with McCain and Palin skits.

The first skit for analysis is the second Democratic Debate between Obama and Hillary Clinton (portrayed by Amy Poehler) that first aired on March 1, 2008. In this debate parody news anchors Brian Williams and Tim Russert (portrayed by Will Forte and Darrell Hammond) continue to fawn over Obama, while giving Hillary extremely difficult questions. Just like in the first Democratic skit, *SNL* parodies the blatant media bias toward Obama over Hillary. In the skit Hillary calls herself “aggressive...relentless...demanding...annoying...pushy...bossy... grating and shrill” which are just the characteristics she feels are needed to be an effective President. The journalists grill Hillary about the issues and a celebrity cameo by Vincent D’Onofrio of *Law and Order* furthers the tone of interrogation. The moderators contrastingly refer to Obama as “extremely eloquent, really, really eloquent” and apologize if any of their questions seemed too

nosy or made him uncomfortable as well as “extraordinarily courageous.” They even feed him the answers to questions regarding foreign policy before asking him.

There were only two comments on this skit from the time it was posted until Election Day, and they did not even mention Obama’s portrayal. Poster capoelestra commented on D’Onofrio’s unexpected cameo writing, “The L&O sounds had me in stitches [*sic*]. And I love Vincent, even when he starts looking a little fluffy and scruffy.” Viewer Country_First states that “Tim Russert was a good person” a few months after Russert’s unexpected death (Michaels, 2008d). Even though *SNL*’s portrayal of Obama commented on the media’s bias of Obama, it seems that viewers did not care as much about it when he was only running against Hillary for the nomination. As read in other comment threads, many viewers also felt that Armisen’s portrayal is not extremely accurate nor does he parody much other than Obama’s speech pattern. For these reasons, as well as the amount of time before the election, there was no documented influence on viewers’ perceptions of Obama.

The second skit is the parody of the first presidential debate between Obama and John McCain (played by Darrell Hammond) that originally aired on *SNL* on September 27th. The skit mostly parodies McCain and his efforts to engage Obama in increasingly odd town hall format debates including pie eating contests, nude debates and a race to capture Osama bin Laden. Hammond again portrays McCain as unstable and out of touch, while for most of the skit Obama is merely portrayed as the ‘straight man’ in the comedy with not many humorous lines. The one different aspect about this skit is when Obama says he will play “the race card” against Kim Jong-Il of North Korea to stop nuclear production if traditional diplomacy fails. Obama claims he will tell Kim, “Alright, I get it. I know why you're really refusing to stop the program.' And he would say, 'No, what are you talking about?' And I would say, 'It's because I don't look like all

the other Presidents you've dealt with.' Then he would say, 'Wait. That's not fair. That has nothing to do with it.' And I would add, 'That's cool, I understand. I'm different. I'm not like the other guys on the five and ten dollar bills.'" Obama thinks Kim would eventually give in, but if he didn't Obama would use his 'rock-star' status to convince actress Scarlett Johansson to have dinner with Kim as a negotiation tactic. This is the only time in any of *SNL*'s portrayals of Obama leading up to Election Day Armisen infers he will use race to his advantage.

There were 145 comments on this video after it was posted until the end of Election Day, which is less than the skits portraying Palin, but still considerably more than those of Hillary. The two main themes of discussion on the comment boards were Armisen's caricature of Obama and the media and *SNL*'s perceived bias for Obama and against McCain.

Many viewers had directly opposing views about Armisen's portrayal of Obama. Commenter Joho1 thought the skit was a "let down...[and] the Obama representation needs work" and suggests Armisen plays up Obama's "continual head bob" and "his UMMM's." Poster undrgrndwmn agrees by asking if this is "really the best SNL could do? He has several distinctive mannerisms that this comedian totally failed to capture." Luchik33 also points out that "Obama smiles a lot while this guy shows him as very serious." The Internet comments allow for debate and contradiction like gabymiller states it is the "worst worst worst Obama impression possible," while proudpatriot says it is "a great Obama impersonation." Viewer sol_goode attributes the skits comedic failure, which he calls "disappointing," not to Armisen's portrayal, or even his blackness. He thinks the writing is to blame because "the scenes with Armisen as Obama are filler...present only to propel the story and motivate [McCain] to say or do something silly." This leads into the same idea many other viewers find- that the Obama impersonations are biased against McCain.

There are many commenters on this video that are happy to see that this skit was not biased, like so many others had been previously. KentuckyMom “love[s] that SNL makes fun of both sides because this election is getting ridiculous,” and JeanBug was “FINALLY glad to [see] some fun being poked at Obama as well.” Poster Instantkarma directly calls out the critics by writing, “Finally something to shut up all the crybaby McCain supporters who claim SNL is biased. This definitely took a well aimed shot at both candidates.” Viewer k8g also “believe[s] SNL’s writers are doing exceptionally well in maintaining a balanced and unbiased perspective.” Icinpa writes “FINALLY Obama is called out on using the race Card! THANK YOU SNL!” However this view is immediately shot down by Dimples34 who asks, “at what point in time has Obama ever played the race card? So again, SNL is being funny; saying what the American public feels about his race...but HE HIMSELF has NEVER mentioned it.” These comments suggest the skit reinforced the viewers’ preconceived ideologies because they seem glad both sides are being parodied. Some McCain supporters are glad to see Obama ribbed, and some Obama supporters are glad for the laughs.

There are still many who criticize *SNL* and this skit for favoring Obama. Onefire27 is disappointed because “SNL is supposed to be ‘equal opportunity offenders’ and that clearly is not the case here....Obama had some pretty funny slip-ups in that debate too, and they did not pick up on that.” DarinStevens63935 agrees that “Barry O did more sneering and eye rolling than Al Gore” and his comment about having a bracelet too was a great set up “...but the Saturday Night Live Obama-Biden lovefest didn’t go near them. If SNL were anymore biased, they’d have to air it on MSNBC.” UXNpower states “the clear purpose of this sketch was to make John McCain look like an idiot and Barack Hussein Obama like some kind of god and savior,” and busmommy is “so sick of the liberal bias [she] could puke.” One poster even suggested that

SNL's bias toward Obama was influencing her. Dundermiffingirl08 asks, "Why do all of these skits make McCain look bad, what about Obama?...the media today is completely one sided and it is making an influence on young people like myself" (Michaels, 2008o). So, although many viewers were glad to see some equality in character portrayals, this skit reinforced many viewers' perceptions of media bias and *SNL*'s influence on perceptions of Barack Obama.

The last Obama portrayal skit for analysis is the "Barack Obama Variety Half Hour" sketch that speculates about his upcoming national address on three of the four major television networks. Maya Rudolph makes a return appearance to the show as Michelle Obama and discusses with Barack about how they are so far ahead in the election polls so they will use the infomercial time to air a variety show. Clips of the proposed variety show include the Obama's singing "Solid as Barack," Nancy Pelosi, Barney Frank and Rahm Emmanuel singing "Our House is a very, very fine House," Bill Clinton singing "Don't you Forget About Me" and Rev. Jeremiah Wright singing "White Devils Be Crazy." There is also a skit showing the spirit of John F. Kennedy endorsing Obama and an interview with Joe Biden while he is eating a rubber foot to "put his foot in his mouth." The skit did not really criticize Obama in any way except to mention his association with Wright and Biden and to highlight media bias towards him.

The majority of the comments about this video are general political debates, as with many of the other skits, but the rest of the comments follow the themes of the presidential debate parody. Several viewers, like counteveryvote, janfreem and dianahawthorne, thought this was an "awesome skit" and "one of the funniest sketches ever!" Comments quoting the "Solid as Barack" song were scattered throughout the message board and TLCESQ asks where he can find a ringtone of it so he could play it while waiting in line to vote. Even Republicans like poster McCainPalin says he "doesn't like Obama but this song is so f*cking funny." However, many

viewers comment on how unfunny and inaccurate Armisen's portrayal of Obama are.

Commenter Walkerre addresses the skit, "Hey SNL I thought we were past the days of actors appearing in 'black face.' You should rethink your Barak Obama skits I mean come on have we gone back to the days of Al Jolson?" Viewer rf2008tbo states, "If Barack Obama is elected President, I hope that SNL finds someone better to impersonate him. Nothing worse than a white man trying to pretend he is Black. Many more viewers thought the skit was not funny, but most cite SNL's bias and unwillingness to poke fun at Obama. Poster deepblue states, "NOT funny at all. Why isn't SNL doing spoors on Obama like they do on McCain and Palin? Not cool."

Erin_be52 agrees that if "this was SNL's attempt at being fair and balance...It wasn't funny."

BPernal was glad to see a sketch parodying Obama, but notes, "Isn't it interesting that bashing Palin is funny, but a joke on Obama is racist? It wasn't that funny." Patrickisoverrated continues that he

think[s] it's funny that the liberal media can slam John McCain and Sarah Palin relentlessly and everyone praises NBC for doing such a good job on their sketches, but as soon as SNL decides they can make fun of Barack Obama, the comments are flying about racism and how they are being unfair to Obama...People please....grow up and learn how to take what you dish out.

As with many of the other skits, posters like janfiora were tired of all the political debating on the site as she writes

Umm, I thought this was where we commented on the SNL skit, but I forgot that people seem to think these forums are for their own agendas and they can say whatever hateful, ignorant things they want...SNL's writers have done a great job so far of keeping political satire alive and offering us laughs through our tears.

The skit influenced some viewers' perceptions of Obama because it made them think about his platform. Commenter onthefence writes that Obama should actually use his TV time to create public support of charitable organizations, and "spending this amount of money for a half hour 3 network prime-time ad is obscene." This skit makes her "think he is actually beginning to believe

he is a superstar.” Quacker1163 admits that “they [SNL] seem to be swaying the election” with the added *Weekend Update Thursday* shows and the way “the slammed McCain on all the episodes,” noting that “only this week is there anything about slamming Obama and Biden...Much more funny material could have been done if SNL writers were clearly not democratic. The job of president should not be influenced by comedy” (Michaels, 2008j).

In general, viewers did not perceive the skits portraying Barack Obama to be as funny or as controversial as those portraying John McCain and Sarah Palin. Even though some of the skits did air close to Election Day, there were still not as many relevant comments regarding the skits. There were complaints of bias and racism, though, and some viewers did claim the skit somewhat influenced their perceptions of Obama.

Joe Biden- Jason Sudekis

Jason Sudekis’s portrayal of Joe Biden has been discussed in the previous sections in some detail, but there were only two skits that focused mainly on Biden and one was a one-minute clip during the *Presidential Bash* the night before the election. As previously discussed, many viewers perceived a bias toward Obama and Biden by SNL they claim is evidenced by the lack of skits and critical humor of the democratic candidates. Biden also never appeared on the show in person, unlike the other candidates, to comment on Sudekis’ portrayal of him.

The “Vice Presidential Debate” skit is summarized above in the Sarah Palin-Tina Fey section, but to recap, Sudekis portrays Biden as loud, unstable and pompous while constantly throwing out inaccurate facts and criticizing his “dear, dear friend” John McCain. Biden’s character also goes on a rant about how his hometown Scranton, Pennsylvania is a “hell hole” and a “genetic cesspool” filled with “sad, sad desperate people,” and his current district in

Wilmington, Delaware “is not much better.” His closing statement during the debate parody sums up Sudekis’s portrayal of Biden:

My goal tonight was a simple one. To come up here and at no point seem like a condescending, egomaniacal bully. And I'm gonna be honest, I think I nailed it. Sure there were moments when I wanted to say, ‘Hey, this lady is a dummy!’ But I didn't! Because Joe Biden is better than that. I repeat: Joe Biden... [he acknowledges himself] is better... than that. [he points to Palin, who waves] So to all of the pundits who said I would seem cocky or arrogant... you dopes got schooled, Biden-style!

Although this skit has the second most comments of the election skit videos, there is only a small portion of these comments that discuss Sudekis or Biden. As with the Palin/Hillary skit, Tina Fey’s portrayal of Sarah Palin seems to outshine Biden’s character in this skit. However, many viewers did notice Sudekis’s portrayal and praise him for it. Probama writes, “Tina Fey was great as usual, but let’s give some props to that guy playing Biden- I thought he was hilarious!” Commenter ml2008 says “Forget Tina Fey. Jason Sudekis had me shrieking with laughter as Joe Biden,” and Christion8876 “loves what they did with Senator Biden as well...too bad there’s only one VP debate.” There were even several comments from people who live in Scranton, Pennsylvania and Wilmington, Delaware who loved the, albeit negative, shout-out. SPVB216 writes, “Hey! I’m from Scranton! And yea it is a hellhole...”

The remainder of the comments pertaining to Biden in this skit mirrored those of the comments on Barack Obama’s portrayal. The viewers sense a heavy favoritism toward the Obama/Biden ticket and discuss the lack of humor in Biden’s portrayal. Kate_G “didn’t think any of Biden’s dialogue was funny,” and New_Jersey_Darling states that the *SNL* writers paid “almost no attention to Joe Biden during the actual debate. They could have parodied his personality as fully as they did Palin.” This also brings up how many viewers commented on the “soft-balling” characterization of Biden compared to Palin. Poster McCainMilf2008 suggests the show should have “used Sen. Biden’s wrong facts more...to even out the skit [because] he is

known as Senator WRONG.” BHonest notes that “SNL didn’t mention any of Joken Joe’s several gaffs...[and] instead chose to pound on Palin.” MattW323 calls the parody “absurd” because they didn’t poke fun at any of Biden’s lies, and he thinks that “now it is out of control and they’re being unfair. The media has played such a bias role in this campaign it’s sickening.” The same poster also compares the *SNL* coverage of Biden to Palin stating, “SNL has pounded on Palin...and has all but ignored Biden...If Palin made just one of Biden’s gaffs, she would be OFF THE TICKET. Yet SNL does not touch him and his stupid gaffs at all.” As with the other skits, however, there were almost as many comments in opposition to these statements. Self-identified Biden supporter Mrb6242 “can still look at SNL’s characterization and realize there is a bit of truth there.” Poster potown “think[s] what the conservatives fail to see is that this skit is lampooning Biden just as much as Palin” so they only “see what they want to see and ignore the rest.” SpooifyLady continues that “they made fun of Biden too, showing his arrogance and his eagerness to commend McCain” and the portrayal is just as “derisive as that of Palin.” One viewer seemed to be influenced by this skit, but not in her perceptions of Biden- in her perception of Jason Sudekis. Commenter LovesRyanGosling states that even though she previously thought he was funny, “Jason was just out of line ...[and] now [she doesn’t] like him at all.” She goes on to explain that her parents were born and raised in Scranton, and although she “know[s she] shouldn’t take this seriously...but ...it was rude of him to say...so [she] lost all respect for Jason.” There were no comments, other than those discussed in the Palin-Fey section, indicating any influence on viewers’ perceptions of Joe Biden from this skit.

The only full length skit that portrays Joe Biden is the Road to the White House skit parodying a press conference in which Biden claims that if elected, “during the first few weeks in office, this brilliant young President is going to be tested...by an international crisis, the likes

of which this nation has never before seen!” Sudekis continues to make predictions and future claims, and even starts prophesying the future, “by the trident of Neptune...and by the beard of Jupiter,” telling the audience to “beware the man with ONE sandal! He who is not of woman born!” As the announcer states at the beginning of this clip, this skit is meant to parody Biden’s actual gaffs and the public’s perception that he could “blow the election for Obama.”

There were 75 comments on this skit from when it first aired on October 25th, to just a week later on Election Day, and again the majority of the comments were general political statements and debates between posters. The main themes follow similar patterns to the comments about Fey’s portrayal of Palin in the Couric interview. Many viewers commented on how some of what Biden’s character said was almost exactly what Biden actually said in his press conference. Poster armyguy1893 states that “this is really file footage, not a skit. Honestly,” and RepnTN writes, “it was a [*sic*] honest depiction of what Biden is.” Just as the comments in the previous skits, many viewers found the show, and even this skit to be a biased portrayal of Biden. Several posts comment on how “unfunny” and “lame” this skit is because it does not criticize Biden and the Democrats enough. Caitlin_x writes that this skit “was not nearly as funny or well-received as when SNL had Tina Fey quote Palin at the Couric interview verbatim,” and MEINPHILLY asks, “What the hell was SNL thinking when they came up with this skit? Not funny at all....Republicans have run out of topics so as usual they make things up and twist everything!” There were many statements about how *SNL* was portraying McCain and Palin more negatively simply because “the Dems simply don’t bumble on the same level as the Repubs and therefore, don’t make for skits that are anywhere near as funny.” Erin_be52 says it “still wasn’t funny...Sarah and Bush make up the funniest political dialogue for SNL...This one gets 1 star,” and Unethicalstupidpalin says the “10/25/08 show was boring without [McCain and

Palin] to laugh at” because “those people give them so much laughable statements.” Republican commenters deny the skit wasn’t funny because Biden is less funny than Palin. Poster freenterprisechic claims, “Democrats don’t think it’s funny when they are the butt of the joke....I think it was hilarious in a sad and tragic sort of way.” TheNick posits that because “SNL is a liberal show, they are getting ready for an Obama presidency by practicing making fun of dems.”

Even with the relatively low number of comments, there are still a few viewers who claim the skit made them think. After watching the skit LenaLolo “wanted to see what was actually said” so it caused her to look up video of the actual press conference. Commenter yintwin also researched and read what Biden actually said after seeing the skit because she “thought this skit was Hilarious, but also a little edgey-even for SNL...[the real speech is] some scary sh**!!! For REAL!” (Michaels, 2008q). So, even though no viewers claim to have changed their mind or their vote based on this skit, it did cause a few to be influenced by Biden’s portrayal while watching the actual event. Just as with the Palin-Couric skit, several viewers used their pre-formed perceptions of the event after seeing the portrayal to view and understand what actually happened.

The third and final skit for analysis of Sudekis’s Biden impersonation is the one-minute segment of Biden during the *Presidential Bash* special the night before the election. Sudekis basically reprises the previous press conference speech by quoting “Mark my words- Barack Obama will be the next President of the United States, and as sure as he does, during the first six months of his presidency, he will face a crisis. I guarantee it!...The cause of that crisis will be ME! Running my mouth! You can count on it because I am a one-man gaff factory!” There are only six comments on this clip, probably due to the fact it was the night before Election Day and

people did not care as much after the results were in. Of the six comments, three are 'spam' posts with links to other election and comedy videos. Of the relevant comments to the wire simply states "great clip!" Schloko1 criticizes Obama and Biden for not appearing on the show again as the "real" McCain and Palin did, but ariachild directly counters that "maybe Obama's just not as desperate as the McCain/Palin ticket" (Michaels, 2008m). No real controversy was found in the actual skit's portrayal of Biden, and no real influence was made on viewers' perception of him just the night before the election.

Just as Biden did not show up in person on *SNL*, his portrayal also did not appear much at all. Sudekis generally appeared in skits focusing on the other candidates, and used the same caricature of Biden's many gaffs in the skits that parodied him more. There was however, controversy and criticism that this was because of *SNL*'s liberal bias, which tended to reinforce viewers' preconceived ideas about media bias supporting Obama and Biden.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Comedy shows such as *SNL*, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* definitely took advantage of the 2008 election. This thesis tackled many questions about the connection of politics and comedy television and follows in the path of other researchers' work on *David Letterman*, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* as well as previous work on *SNL*. This type of political comedy "is largely focused on personal traits of public figures rather than policy and the jokes tend to draw on preexisting negative stereotypes people have of these public figures" (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008, 2006). This thesis is one of the first studies to use alternative means, such as Internet comments, to assess viewers' perceptions of political candidates and political humor on television and the Internet.

There is an array of attitudes, emotions and beliefs expressed in the viewers' online comments, and the purpose of this study was to critically analyze these comments to make some sense of how the viewers "used" *Saturday Night Live* skits and videos, and if and how the skits influenced the viewers' perceptions of the candidates. Many commenters and posters specifically cite the video they (just) viewed as reason to think of topics differently or to change their votes. The hope was to find real instances in which the posters' online comments show *Saturday Night Live* did influence viewers' perceptions of the candidates and possibly votes through studying their own words. FirstView Election 2008 Survey Research wrote that "10% of voters said they were influenced by the skits" in a November 5, 2008 press release. They went on to say, "At the same time, the data shows that 59% of those who saw the skits voted for Obama and 39% voted for McCain" ('FirstView survey results'). Holbert and Geidner (2009) postulate that "the audience created around these skits had the potential to influence a large number of individuals

who were forming attitudes and making some important political behavior decisions during the course of the campaign,” and that the reactions to these skits could “have an influence on a range of democratic outcomes” (p. 352-353). This held true for the writing and performances of the major presidential candidates on SNL during the race for the 2008 election. This thesis detailed the candidates’ appearances in each skit, and the portrayals of these candidates on the show, as well as viewers’ comments and responses to the skits. The closer to the election the candidate appeared or the skit aired, the more popular and/or controversial the skit was, the more potential the skit had to influence viewers. This is illustrated in John McCain’s repeat performances at varying times throughout the campaign as well as Sarah Palin’s appearances in close proximity to the election. Hillary Clinton’s and Barack Obama’s appearances toward the beginning of the campaign had less influence on viewers, who did not respond as much about the politics of the skit as they did about humorous elements of the appearances. The actors’ portrayals of the candidates also varied in controversy and viewer influence in line with the date of the original airing and any perceived controversy such as the media bias supporting Obama and Biden and criticizing McCain and Palin.

Some viewers read the text of the videos and skits to keep in line with their preconceived beliefs about the candidates, but many others were influenced to think about the candidate in a different way, change their mind about the candidate altogether, and even to change for whom they were voting. Viewers also used the skits in many different ways. Some used them as a springboard for political debate on the show’s message boards, some used them to attack the candidates and some used them simply for a good laugh. Viewer endlessazul wrote that “if we couldnt [*sic*] laugh, we simply could not cope with the fear being jammed down our throats,” and faithful2jesus commented that “with the economy as it is and the uncertainty [*sic*] in the election

in regard to the honesty and integrity of the candidates, WE NEED something like this to make us laugh and release tension. If we can't laugh at ourselves this nation is in more trouble than it realizes. Thanks for the 'MEDICINE OF LAUGHTER' in a confusing/stressful time." Many posted online comments relayed that the viewers were going to vote one way or another after watching the candidates in skits on *SNL*, but after every such statement there was always a backlash claiming that those who based their votes on the comedy show were stupid, ridiculous and uninformed. David Garth's comment held true to those viewers who posted saying the comedy show's politics was meaningless and should not influence votes, but the candidates' mere appearances on television in another setting makes that appearance important to their campaigns.

Obvious shortcomings of this study are the posthumous research of the 2008 Election, massive quantities of reception data in comments, limited generalizability, and not knowing what the posters were actually thinking, doing or voting. It is not accurate to make generalizations from this research to all viewers of the skits because, as previously stated, these posters are Internet users, generally young, and either fans of the show or extreme dissenters of the show. The viewers had to like or dislike the video skits enough to comment about them online. Research also suggests that computer-mediated communication allows for greater anonymity than personal communication (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984). This could allow for more direct and truthful reactions from viewers, but there is always the possibility that the commenters do not actually believe or feel the way they wrote in their post. Viewer topical humor writes regarding the comments on the videos on the *SNL* website, "Nothing brings out the idiocy, racism, sexism and general awfulness of people than the anonymity of the internet. I hope some

of these issues will be brought to light because of this election [because] for too long, bigots and fools have been spreading idiocy they would elsewhere censor themselves” (Michaels, 2008c).

Most viewers performed a negotiated reading of the skits because they were exposed to new ideas and thought about them, but did not necessarily change their minds about any one candidate. However, throughout the observations and analysis of message boards about candidate appearances and portrayals on *SNL*, the thesis was affirmed that many viewers were influenced by the show in their perspectives, ideas, beliefs, and even votes.

REFERENCES

- Abcarian, R. (2008, March 13). Ferraro quits Clinton campaign after Obama remarks. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved December 2, 2008 from <http://www.latimes.com/news/politics/la-na-ferraro13mar13,0,3428699.story>
- Allen, R. C. (Ed.). (1992). *Channels of discourse reassembled*. University of North Carolina Press. Ed. 2 Pp. 101-137
- Avolio, B. J., Howell, J. M., & Sosik, J. J. (1999). A Funny thing happened on the way to the bottom line: humor as a moderator of leadership style effects. *Academy of Management Journal*, 42(2), 219–227.
- Baird, J., Wingert, P., Springen, K., Soller, K., Wolffe, R., Smalley, S., et al. (2008). From Seneca Falls to ... Sarah Palin? *Newsweek*, 152 (12), 30-36.
- Bartlett, K.J. (1947). Social impact of the radio. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 250, 89-97.
- Baum, M. A. (2003). *Soft news goes to war: Public opinion & American foreign policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Baum, M. A. (2005). Talking the vote: Why presidential candidates hit the talk show circuit. *American Journal of Political Science*. 49, 213-234.
- Baumgartner, J. & Morris, J. (2006). The Daily Show Effect: Candidate evaluations, efficacy, and American youth. *American Politics Research*, 34 (3).
- Baumgartner, J. & Morris, J. (2008). One “Nation,” under Stephen? The effects of The Colbert Report on American youth. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 52 (4); 622-643.
- Berger, A.A. (1987) Humor: An introduction. *American Behavioral Scientist*. 30; 6-15.
- Bianculli, D. (2009). *Dangerously funny: The uncensored Story of The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. New York: Touchstone.
- Bippus, A. (2007). Factors predicting the perceived effectiveness of politicians' use of humor during a debate. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 20(2), 105-21.
- Broughton, I. (1986). *Producers on producing: the making of film and television*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc.
- Carr, S.A. (1992). On the edge of tastelessness: CBS, The Smothers Brothers and the struggle for control. *Cinema Journal*, 31(4), 3-24.
- Chaffee, S. H., Zhao, X., & Leshner, G. (1994). Political knowledge and the campaign media of 1992. *Communication Research*, 21, 305-324.

- Chang, M. J., & Gruner, C. R. (1981). Audience reaction to self-disparaging humor. *Southern Speech Communication Journal*. 46 (4), 419-426.
- CNN. (2008). *CNN laughs it up over Sarah Palin interview*. [Web Video] . Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeMypXCUWMw>
- CNN. (2008, August 23). *Obama introduces Biden as running mate*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/08/23/biden.democrat.vp.candidate/index.html>
- CNN. (2008, August 30). *McCain taps Alaska Gov. Palin as vice president pick*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/08/29/palin.republican.vp.candidate/index.html>
- Colletta, L. (2009). Political satire and postmodern irony in the age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 42(5), 856-874.
- Decker, W. H., & Rotondo, D. M. (2001). Relationships among gender, type of humor, and perceived leader effectiveness. *Journal of Managerial Issues*. 13 (4), 450–465.
- Emery, Noemie. (2008, May 2). Auto-Immune Diversity Syndrome: That from which the Democrats suffer. *National Review/ Digital*. Retrieved November 20, 2008 from <http://nrd.nationalreview.com/article/?q=MDlmODJlODIzYjBjMWMYyY2IyNzY4YjgyYmViMGRmYmM=>
- Fallows, J. (1996). *Breaking the news: How the media undermine American democracy*. New York: Pantheon.
- Federal Election Commission. (2007, May 11). *Contributions to political committees*. Retrieved from <http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/norindsea.shtml>
- Fessier, B. (2006, December 27). Humor played big role in Ford's persona. *The Desert News*. *First view survey results press release*. (2008, November 5). Retrieved from <http://www.firstviewsurvey.com/results.cfm>
- Ford, G. (1979). *A Time to Heal: the autobiography of Gerald R. Ford*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Fred Armisen*. (2008). Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred_Armisen#Personal_life
- Freud, S. (1928). Humour. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 9, 1-6.
- Grotjahn, M. (1987). Dynamics of Jewish Jokes. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 30(3), 96-99.
- Gruner, C. R. (1970). The effect of humor in dull and interesting informative speeches. *Central States Speech Journal*. 21 (2), 160-166.
- Hall, S., Hobson, D., Lowe, A., & Willis, P. (Ed.). (1980). *Culture, media, language*. London: Hutchinson.

- Hammill, G. (2010). Saturday Night Live: U.S. Comedy Variety Program. *Museum of Broadcast Communications*. Retrieved from <http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=saturdaynigh>
- Havig, A. R. (1990). *Fred Allen's Radio Comedy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Herrnson, P. S., & Lucas, J. C. (2006). The Fairer sex?: Gender and negative campaigning in U.S. elections. *American Politics Research*, 34, 69.
- Hillary Clinton recalls SNL parody: Does Obama want pillow? (2008). [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=mYxbRY8MVKc&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DmYxbRY8MVKc
- Hobbes, T. (1996). *Leviathan*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Original work published in 1651).
- Holbert, R. L. (2005). A Typology for the study of entertainment television and politics. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(3), 436-453.
- Holbert, R. L., Lambe, J. L., Dudo, A. D., & Carlton, K. A. (2007). Primacy effects of The Daily Show and national TV news viewing: young viewers, political gratifications and internal political self-efficacy. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 51(1), 20-38.
- Holbert, R. L., & Geidner, N. (2009). The 2008 election: highlighting the need to explore additional communication subfields to advance political communication. *Communication Studies*, 60(4), 344-358.
- Hollander, B. A. (1995). The new news and the 1992 presidential campaign: Perceived vs. actual political knowledge. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 72, 786-798.
- Horner, W. (2009). *The First Saturday night: Saturday Night Live and Gerald Ford*. Proceedings of the Midwest Political Science Association 67th Annual National Conference, http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p363823_index.html
- Jenkins, H. (2010). Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In: U.S. comedy variety. *Museum of Broadcast Communications*, Retrieved from <http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=rowanandmar>
- Kalb, M. (2001). *One scandalous story: Clinton, Lewinsky, and 13 days that tarnished American journalism*. New York: Free Press.
- Kiesler, S, Siegel, J, & McGuire, T.W. (1984). Social psychological aspect of computer-mediated communication. *American Psychologist*, 39, 1123-1134.
- Kohut, A. (2008, January 11). The Internet gains in Politics: Internet's broader role in Campaign 2008. *Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project*. Retrieved from

- <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/The-Internet-Gains-in-Politics/Summary-of-Findings.aspx>
- Kolbert, E. (2004, April 19). Stooping to conquer: why candidates need to make fun of themselves. *The New Yorker*, Retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/04/19/040419fa_fact1
- Kraus, S., & Davis, D. (1976). *The Effects of mass communication on political behavior*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Lang, G. E., & Lang, K. (1984). *Politics and Television Re-Viewed*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Lazarsfeld, P., et al. (1944). *The Peoples' choice*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce.
- Lemer, H. (2003). The Practical qualities for effective leaders. *The Scrivener*. 12 (2), 16.
- Linsky, M. (1983). *Television and the presidential elections*. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books.
- Live, from New York: Barack Obama! (2008, September 11). *People Magazine*, Retrieved from <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20225274,00.html>
- Lewis, M., & Nieuwoudt, J. (1993). The Humor phenomenon: A theoretical perspective. *Mankind Quarterly*, 33(4), 409.
- McLeod, J. M., Guo, Z., Daily, K., Steele, C. A., Huang, H., Horowitz, E., et al. (1996). The impact of traditional and nontraditional media forms in the 1992 presidential election. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 73, 401-416.
- Michaels, L. (2000). SNL presidential bash 2000 [Television series episode]. In (Executive producer), *Saturday Night Live*. New York: NBC.
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2007). *Halloween party- Sen. Barack Obama stops by the Clintons for a trick and a treat*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/Saturday_Night_Live/video/clips/halloween-party/179711/
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008). *3 AM phone call*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/3am-phone-call/227156/>
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008a). *Cold open: CNN raw politics democratic debate*. [WebVideo]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/democratic-debate/229112/?__cid=thefilter
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008b). *Cold Open: A Message from Hillary Clinton*. Retrieved from <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/saturday-night-live-message-from-hillary-clinton>

- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008c). *Couric / Palin open*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/couric__palin_open/704042
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008d). *Democratic debate #2- Hillary and Obama face off again*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/democratic-debate-2/224734/?__cid=thefilter
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008e). *Gov. Palin cold open*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/gov_palin_cold_open/773761
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008f). *Gov. Palin cold open backstage- Gov. Palin pays a visit to the show*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/Saturday_Night_Live/video/clips/backstage-gov-palin-visits/773882/
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008g). *McCain Approves Open- Sen. McCain approves truth-enhanced negative campaign messages*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/mccain_approves_open/669582
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008h). *McCain in One- McCain has the other guys beat, in years*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/Saturday_Night_Live/video/clips/mccain-in-one/252575/
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008i). *McCain QVC Open: Sen. McCain and Gov. Palin (Fey) address the nation on QVC*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/clips/mccain-qvc-open/805381/>
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008j). *Obama address- Barack Obama's variety half hour*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/clips/obama-address/787181/>
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008k). *Palin/Hillary open*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/palin__hillary_open/656281
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008l). *Presidential Bash- Gov. Palin*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/Saturday_Night_Live/video/clips/presidential-bash-gov-palin/807241/
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008m). *Presidential Bash- Sen. Biden*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/clips/presidential-bash-sen-biden/807081/>
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008n). *Presidential Bash: Sen. McCain*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/Saturday_Night_Live/video/clips/presidential-bash-sen-mccain/807061/
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008o). *Presidential Debate- McCain and Obama go head to head*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/presidential-debate/704121/?__cid=thefilter

- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008p). *Response: Sen. Clinton- Editorial Response by Sen. Hillary Clinton*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/Saturday_Night_Live/video/clips/response-sen-clinton/224732/
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008q). *Road to the White House*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/clips/road-to-the-white-house/787141/>
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008r). *SNL Backstage- Sen. John and Cindy McCain*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/Saturday_Night_Live/video/clips/backstage-sen-john-and-cindy-mccain/805601/
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008s). *Update: Mayor Giuliani*. [Web Video] Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/Saturday_Night_Live/video/clips/update-mayor-giuliani/229109/
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008t). *Update: Palin rap- Amy steps in for Gov. Palin*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/Saturday_Night_Live/video/clips/update-palin-rap/773781/
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008u). *Update: Sen. McCain- Senator McCain drops by Weekend Update*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/Saturday_Night_Live/video/clips/update-sen-mccain/252556/
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008v). *Update: Sen. McCain- Sen. McCain unveils his new strategies on Weekend Update*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/Saturday_Night_Live/video/clips/update-sen-mccain/805401/
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008w). *Update Thursday: Debate open Obama and McCain debate the issues*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/update-thursday-debate-open/742065/?__cid=thefilter
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008x). *Update Thursday: Final Debate- Obama and McCain discuss Joe the Plumber in the final Presidential debate*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/update-thursday-final-debate/768721/?__cid=thefilter
- Michaels, L. (Producer). (2008y). *VP Debate open*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/vp_debate_open_palin_biden/727421
- NBC Message Boards* (2008). [Online Forum Comments]. Retrieved from <http://boards.nbc.com/nbc/index.php?showtopic=806261>
- Nixon tapes: Laugh In & Pat Nixon on TV*. (2008). [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2MRy-wyq20&feature=related>
- Notes on people. (1976, April 22). *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://libproxy.library.unt.edu:2175/pqdweb?index=0&did=75239186&SrchMode=2&sid=5&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1319474997&clientId=87>

- Orloff, B. (2008, September 13). Barack Obama Cancels SNL Appearance. *People Magazine*. Retrieved November 5, 2008 from <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20225655,00.html?xid=rss-topheadlines>
- Ozersky, J. (2003). *Archie Bunker's America: TV in an era of change, 1968-1978*. Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Patterson, T. E. (1998). Political roles of journalists. In D. Graber, D. McQuail, & P. Norris (Eds.), *The politics of news: The news of politics* (pp. 17-32). Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Patterson, T. E. (2000). *Doing well and doing good* (Faculty Research Working Paper Series, #RWP01-001). Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.
- Pew Research Center. (2004, January 11). Cable and Internet loom large in fragmented political news universe. *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, Retrieved from <http://people-press.org/report/200/cable-and-internet-loom-large-in-fragmented-political-news-universe>
- Pew Research Center. (2006, July 30). Maturing Internet news audience – broader than deep. *Pew Research Center Biennial News Consumption Survey*, Retrieved from <http://people-press.org/report/?pageid=1070>
- Pew Research Center. (2008, October 29). *Palin fatigue now rivals Obama fatigue*. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, Retrieved from <http://people-press.org/report/466/palin-fatigue-rivals-obama>
- Pool, I. S. (1959). TV: a new dimension in politics. In E. Burdick & A.J. Brodeck (Eds.), *American voting behavior* (pp. 236-61). Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press.
- Priest, R. F. (1966). Election jokes: The effects of reference group membership. *Psychological Reports*. 18 (2), 600-602.
- Priest, R. F. & Abrahams, J. (1970). Candidate preference and hostile humor in the 1968 elections. *Psychological Reports*. 26 (3), 779-783.
- Purcell, K. (2010 June, 3). The state of online video. *Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/State-of-Online-Video.aspx>
- Rackaway, C., Smith, M.A., & Anderson, K. (2003). *The Political satire and "stratery" of Saturday Night Live*. Proceedings of the 2003 Southwestern Political Science Association annual meetings, San Antonio, TX.
- Radio and Television Correspondents Association dinner*. (1997). [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.c-spanarchives.org/program/80234-1>

- Russell, C. A., & Puto, C. P. (1999). Rethinking television audience measures: an exploration into the construct of audience connectedness. *Marketing Letters*, 10(4), 393-407.
- Saturday Night Live hosts*. (2008, October 1). Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturday_Night_Live_hosts#Political_figures_who_have_hosted
- Sederstrom, J. (2008 September, 13). Nothing funny about it: Barack Obama cancels 'Saturday Night Live' appearance due to Ike. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved November 11, 2008 from http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/2008/09/13/2008-09-13_nothing_funny_about_it_barack_obama_canc-2.html
- Shales, T. (1976, April 19). What the President meant was.... *Washington Post*.
- Shales, T. & Miller, J. A. (2002). *Live From New York: An Uncensored History of Saturday Night Live*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.
- Shapiro, M. (2004). Allen, Fred 1894-1956. *Museum of Broadcast Communications Encyclopedia of Radio*, 146-49.
- Silverman, S. (2004, August 3). SNL Offers Hosting Gig to Bill Clinton. *People Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,675481,00.html>
- Slater, M. D. (2007). Reinforcing spirals: the mutual influence of media selectivity and media effects and their impact on individual behavior and social identity. *Communication Theory*, 17(3), 281-303.
- SNL Presidential Bash 2000*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0266934/fullcredits#cast>
- Saturday Night Live Transcripts*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://snltranscripts.jt.org>
- The Smothers Brothers comedy hour*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.smothersbrothers.com>
- Stam, R. (Ed.). (2000). *Film theory: an introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Stam, R., & Miller, T. (Ed.). (2000). *Film and theory: an anthology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Sun Times*. (2008). Viewer comments. Retrieved November 15, 2008 from http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2008/03/sweet_clinton_surprise_saturda.html
- Susman, Gary. (2004, August). My 'Live': "SNL" offers hosting gig to Bill Clinton. *Entertainment Weekly.com*. August 2, 2004. Accessed 5/5/09 from <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,674987,00.html>
- Sweet, L. (2008, March 1). *Sweet: Clinton, Giuliani, surprise Saturday Night Live gig*. Wicked SNL cartoon on Obama sidetracking Sharpton, Jackson. Video [Online Forum

- Comment]. Retrieved from
http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2008/03/sweet_clinton_surprise_saturda.html
- Tamborini, R. & Zillmann, D. (1981). College students' perceptions of lecturers using humor. *Perceptual & Motor Skills*, 52 (2), 427-432.
- Tina Fey's backstage interview at the Emmys 2008*. (2008). Video retrieved October 12, 2008 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKNmZcRZ1Q>
- Tina Fey quotes Sarah Palin word for word*. (2010). . Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgRA8oTk8ig>
- Toff, B. (2008, November 5). 'SNL' Scores With Final 'Bash.' *The New York Times Late Edition*, 2.
- Vidmar, N., & Rokeach, M. (1974). Archie Bunker's bigotry: a study in selective perception and exposure. *Journal of Communication*, 24(1), 36-47.
- Wikipedia. (2011, August 27). *Saturday Night Live (Season 28)*. Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturday_Night_Live_\(season_28\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturday_Night_Live_(season_28))
- Young, D. G. (2004). Late-night comedy in election 2000: Its influence on candidate trait ratings and the moderating effects of political knowledge and partisanship. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 48, 1-22.